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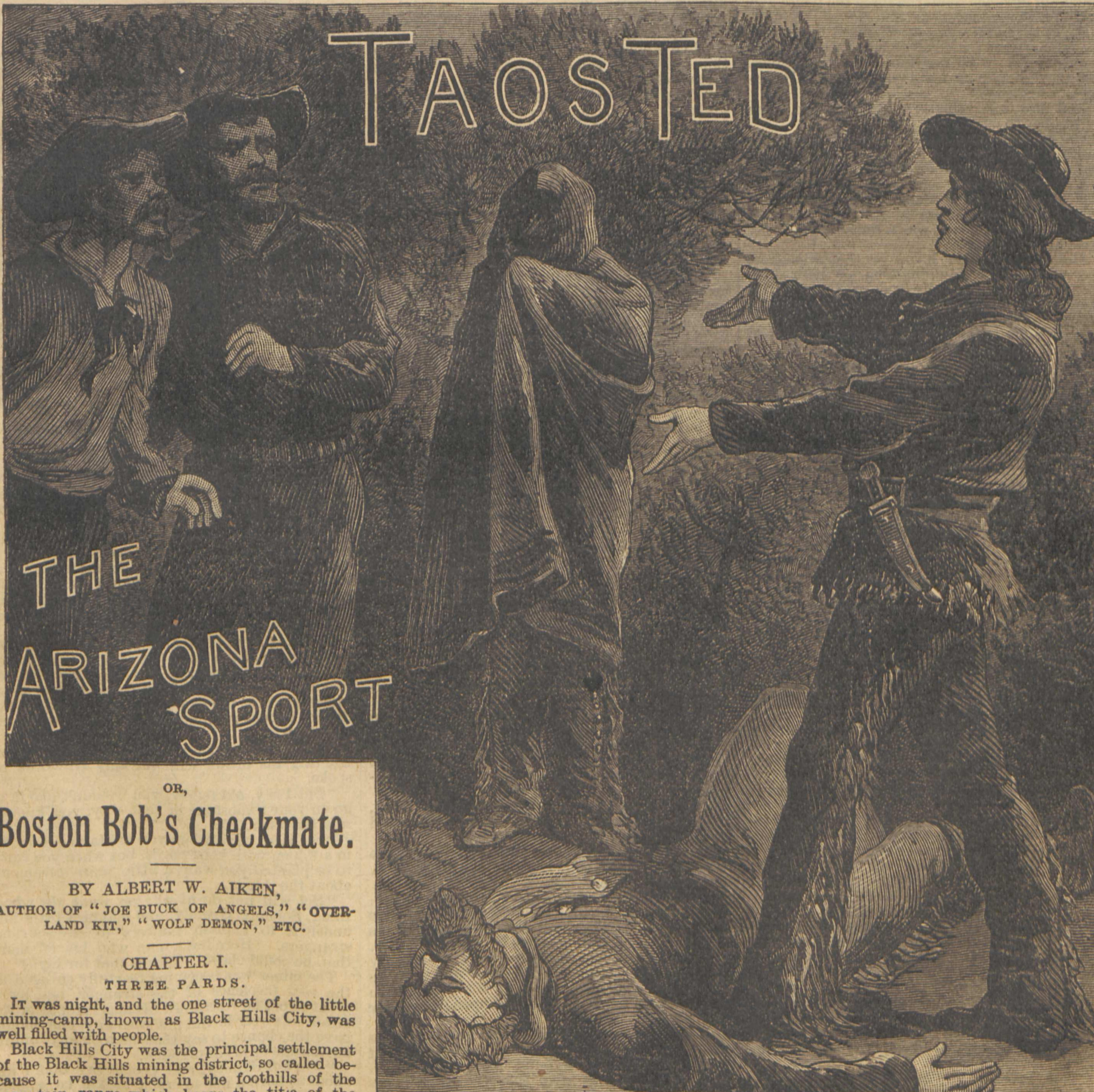
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Boston Bob's Checkmate.

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AUTHOR OF "JOE BUCK OF ANGELS," "OVER-LAND KIT," "WOLF DEMON," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THREE PARDS.

It was night, and the one street of the little mining-camp, known as Black Hills City, was well filled with people.

Black Hills City was the principal settlement of the Black Hills mining district, so called because it was situated in the foothills of the mountain range which bears the title of the Black Hills.

The camp was located on a small stream,

FOR ANSWER THE STRANGER OPENED HIS HANDS AND SHOWED THE BARE PALMS. "NO, NO,
I SCORN TO USE A WEAPON WHEN MY FOE HAS NONE!" TAOS TED CRIED.

Taos Ted, the Arizona Sport.

locally known as Salt Creek because it was one of the headwaters of Salt River.

The district was a rich one, and as it was but a short journey from the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad trail through the middle of Arizona, lying due south of it, it was being settled with even more than the usual Western rapidity.

The precious ore was of such a nature that it could be easily handled, and miners working on their "own hook," with rude and primitive tools, were able to make good wages.

The "boom" was such an extensive one that old miners—the veterans who had assisted in the founding of many a lively camp, and were therefore competent to judge—"reckoned that the town had come to stay."

Only one obstacle appeared to be in the way, and that was the presence of Indians in the neighborhood.

There was an Indian village up in the Black Hills, the inhabitants being a branch of the warlike Apache tribe, and the red chiefs viewed with a jealous eye the near approach of the bearded pale-faces.

At the time of which we write, the red-men of Arizona had not felt the power of the Government to any great extent, and were disposed to believe that in their mountain fastnesses they could bid defiance to all the force the white men could bring against them.

So, as the red bucks were disposed to be ugly, the miners were forced to go heavily armed, and were obliged to be constantly on their guard lest they should be surprised by the wily savages.

And now, after this brief explanation, come we at once to our story.

The mining-camp could boast of about one hundred and fifty souls all told, nearly all men, and very few women or children.

A rough-and-ready set of men they were, too, and the town could produce as many hard cases as any camp of its size in Arizona, and as a natural consequence it was a remarkably lively place after nightfall.

Almost every other house on the main street was a saloon or gambling-den, or both combined, as was generally the case, and, after darkness covered the earth, they were usually well patronized.

From eight o'clock until twelve all were in full blast, and then the camp sunk to sleep.

It was near midnight on this particular night of which we write, and the miners had begun to seek their bunks; some of the saloons, deserted by their patrons, had put out their lights, and, as a consequence, the street began to present a gloomy appearance.

There was a moon, but as it was on the wane, and the sky filled with passing clouds, it afforded but little light.

At the upper end of the town was a small clump of trees, growing close to the bank of the river, along which the main street of the town ran.

Amid the trees, seated upon the ground, was an Indian, wrapped from head to feet in a blanket.

Some few of the miners who chanced to pass that way were keen-sighted enough to perceive the motionless figure, but beyond saluting the red-skin with a few vigorous oaths and expressions of contempt, none of them took any notice of the savage until three men came along just before midnight, all under the influence of liquor.

One of the three was a big fellow, dressed in a complete suit of buckskin, and armed to the teeth, evidently more mountain-man than miner.

The others appeared like ordinary citizens of the camp.

The moment the big man caught sight of the figure wrapped in the blanket, he immediately called the attention of his companions to it.

"See hyer, boyees, durn my cats! Jist clap yer peepers on that ar' red-skin, squatting like a toad in that ar' timber."

"Oho, boyees, do you know I hate an Injun jist like pison, the durned red niggers! An' if I had my way I would raise a fuss an' wipe out these red skunks up in the Black Hills afore you could say Jack Robinson!"

The savage moved not.

If the red-skin had been a graven image, he couldn't have taken less notice of the speech.

This fact irritated the big man, who had drank just about liquor enough to make him feel ugly.

"Oho, I reckon you hain't got no tongue in yer mouth, nor ary bit of sense in yer head, you durned red son of a perairie snake!" he cried angrily.

"Mebbe if I gi'n ye a whack or two across

the chops, you will l'arn to open yer 'tater-trap when a gen'leman talks to you!"

And as he spoke the big man strode toward the savage as though with the intention of carrying out the threat.

The hitherto motionless figure at last showed signs of life.

The Indian stood erect and the whites saw that it was a woman.

Their astonishment was great.

"Wa-al, now, may I be kicked to death by crippled mules if I expected the red buck would turn out to be a heifer!" the big fellow exclaimed.

His two companions loudly expressed their amazement.

But the Indian woman spoke not. If she was silent though through the belief that now her tormenters had discovered she was a woman they would go away, she was doomed to disappointment, for the big fellow manifested no such intention.

On the contrary he came still nearer to where she stood and endeavored to peer through the folds of the blanket, so as to get a view of her face, but in this he was frustrated, for she held the blanket so closely around her head that all that could be distinguished was a pair of flashing eyes, black as midnight.

"Say, drop that blanket so I kin git a look at ye!" the mountain-man exclaimed.

"I've knowed a heap of Injun gals in my time and mebbe you are some heifer I have run across before."

"Drop yer blanket, old gal, an' let us have a squint at yer physiohogimy—that's a big word for ye, pard, but I'm idicated, I am, an' you kin bet all your stamps onto it!"

But the only answer the Indian made to this demand was to draw her blanket still closer together.

The big man noted this and his wrath was immediately excited.

"Durn yer copper-colored skin, don't ye know that I am a gen'leman of the first water?" he demanded, angrily.

"An' I am the man, too, who has made a heap of your red, no-souled, white-livered brothers hunt their holes in a hurry, an' if you was only a buck now, durn my gizzard! if I wouldn't jest whale you out of yer moccasins!"

And the big fellow shook his fist fiercely at the woman to emphasize the threat.

But the Indian did not show the least sign of fear, facing the angry white man undauntedly, while her eyes blazed with lurid fires.

The defiance so plainly expressed by the eyes irritated the mountain-man.

"Ain't got no tongue in yer head, I reckon!" he exclaimed, "jes' as I said afore!"

"You ar' looking durned sassy though, all the same! I reckon I'll have to pull that ar' kiver off yer head, so as to see what kind of a heifer you ar', anyway!"

"That's the talk! Sail in, Bill!" exclaimed one of the other men, and his companion echoed the exclamation.

"Yes, sail in, Bill, and pull the kiver off so we kin git a look at the beauty!"

But at this critical moment for the Indian a new-comer appeared upon the scene.

He had approached quietly, so that his presence was not suspected until he spoke.

"Hello, hello, what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

The three turned in surprise and beheld a good-looking young fellow, seemingly about twenty-five years old, dressed rather fancifully in a buckskin suit, but the garments were not hunting-shirt and leggings, but coat and pantaloons.

His chest was covered by a blue flannel shirt, with a wide, rolling collar, which was turned down over his coat.

The leather belt which spanned his supple waist supported a pair of revolvers and a good, stout bowie knife.

His head was crowned by a cream-colored, wide-brimmed slouch hat, from under which his long yellow hair, pushed carelessly back of his ears, fell in tangled ringlets to his shirt collar.

His features were finely cut and strongly marked; while the clear, full eyes and massive chin gave ample evidence that the young man was one who could be depended upon in the hour of danger.

Both in dress and personal appearance he was decidedly different from the common run of men as they are to be found upon the frontier, and it was not strange that the three pards whose amusement he seemed inclined to interrupt, should gaze upon him with considerable wonder written upon their faces.

And there was an ugly look in the eyes of all

of the three, too, as though they did not like his interference, and were inclined to resent it.

On his part, too, the new-comer carefully surveyed the three, for he was too experienced in the manners of the border not to understand that the others would be apt to be quarrelsome

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE DIFFICULTY.

THE big fellow was the first to speak.

"Hello yourself an' be hanged to you!" he exclaimed.

"Who told you to put your lip in anyway? What business is it of yours?"

"No particular business," the other replied in a light and airy way, which immediately gave mortal offense to the questioner.

"All there is to it is, that I saw there was a racket going on, and I thought I would see what game you were up to."

"Wa-al, stranger, thar ain't any business hyer for you, and the quicker you git up and dust, the better it will be for yer health."

"Yes, thar ain't nc mistake 'bout that!" cried the smaller one of the two miners, a fellow with a short, black beard and a generally "hard" look.

He was known as Sol Grundy, and bore the reputation of being an ugly man when roused.

"You're a stranger in this hyer camp, I take it, and I want you to understand that this hyer part of the town is durned unhealthy for strange pilgrims, 'tic'lly when they ain't got sense enough to 'tend to their own business!" the miner continued.

"You had better not open your mouth so wide, for you might catch cold," the new-comer rejoined, in a most contemptuous manner.

The three could hardly believe that they had heard aright.

Did this stranger dare to "cheek" three such men as they were, right in the main street of their own camp?

The three looked at each other as much as to ask which was the speediest way of ridding the earth of this bold intruder.

And then the same thought came simultaneously into their minds.

The stranger was acting in this rash manner because, being a stranger, he hadn't any idea of the kind of men he had run across.

"Say!" exclaimed the big fellow, abruptly "mebbe this hyer galoot don't know that we are loaded, an' that is the reason he thinks it is safe to fool with us."

"In that case I reckon I had better introduce myself," Grundy remarked.

"Yes, for arter you jest wipe the airth with him, it may be a satisfaction for him to know that one of the best men in Black Hills City has put the job through," suggested the other miner, who answered to the name of Gideon Bellport.

"Go ahead with your introductions, by all means, gentlemen," the stranger responded.

"It is always a satisfaction for me to know beforehand the name of the man I have to kill, and then, after the trick is done, I don't have to hunt round and inquire who he is, so as to get the right name on his tombstone."

This was mere bluff and bravado, of course, and as none of the three felt equal to the task of excelling the stranger in this line, they did not make the attempt, but Sol Grundy took it upon himself to post the new-comer in regard to the danger he was running in daring to bandy words with him.

"My name is Sol Grundy!" he declared, contracting his brows with an ugly frown as he spoke.

"But I say, old fellow, you wouldn't like it to go on your tombstone in that way, you know," said the other.

"Sol is all right when you are taking in a saloon with your pards, but when you are to be planted you want a little more care about the thing."

"Sol will not do at all; we want the right thing, Solomon Grundy, and maybe a lawyer under it to explain matters to our friends. Here lies a man who bit off more than he could chew." How is that for a reply?

The miner was becoming fearfully enraged at the cool insolence of the stranger, but, by a great effort he restrained his anger, for after the affair was over he did not wish any one should have the chance to say that he took any unfair advantage of his antagonist.

"I'm Sol Grundy, and people say that I am about as hard a nut to crack as kin be scoured up in this hyer destrict."

"I believe you, Mister Grundy," the stranger remarked with a polite bow.

"I will take your word for it, for your looks

imply that you are as big a scoundrel as ever escaped a white jail."

At this point the miner felt that patience had ceased to be a virtue.

He was particularly touchy as regards jail, for it was rumored that his presence in Black Hills City was due to a midnight flitting from a county jail in Illinois, where he had been placed for safe-keeping on account of a little misunderstanding in regard to the ownership of a horse found in his possession and which was claimed in an extremely urgent and ungentlemanly manner by a stock-raiser in an adjoining county.

"If you say I escaped from a jail, you lie like blazes!" the miner yelled, excitedly, doubling up his fists and preparing for war.

The other immediately comprehended that he had touched the miner on the "raw," and hastened to repeat the dose.

"Oh, come down! You know darned well that you have been in more jails than you have fingers and toes!" the stranger cried.

"The only trouble is that no one has ever yet been able to build a jail strong enough to hold you!"

This was adding the last straw beneath which the camel's back gave way.

Sol Grundy waited to hear no more, but, with a yell of defiance, rushed upon the young stranger, intending to grapple with him.

The miner prided himself upon his tactics as a rough-and-tumble fighter, and in that line had won quite a reputation in the neighborhood.

He was a much heavier man, apparently, than the new-comer, and he felt certain that if he once got the stranger within his grip he would be able to make him yell for mercy.

But the other knew a trick worth two of this.

He had not the slightest idea of allowing the other to close in with him, and as Grundy came on, open-handed, to grasp him, he measured the distance with the ease and skill of a practiced boxer, and sending out his solid right fist, took the miner between the eyes with terrible force.

Over backward went Grundy—a wonderful amount of stars dancing before his eyes—as stonished a man as the land of Arizona had ever seen.

And to add to his discomfiture, as his head struck the ground, it came in contact with a rock, just level with the surface, with such force as to stun him.

This fact, however, escaped the notice of his companions, and when they saw that Grundy was so stunned as to be unable to rise, they immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was the sledge-hammer-like stroke of the stranger which had done the mischief, and greatly astonished were they at the circumstance.

Never before in all their experience had they ever beheld a foeman disposed of in so summary a manner.

The stranger himself was amazed at the victory, for he had not expected to "knock out" the miner thus easily.

"By the great jumping Jehosaphat!" cried the mountain-man, "stranger, I reckon you must have some weepin' in your hand, or else you couldn't have laid Grundy out in no sich hyar way as this ar'!"

For answer the stranger opened his hands and showed the bare palms.

"No, no, I scorn to use a weapon when my foe has none!" Taos Ted said.

The big fellow shook his head.

"Durn me if this hyer don't beat my time!" he admitted, with a shake of the head.

"Why, I have been all along this frontier, and boy, nigh onto forty years, and have many fights as any man you kin pick a hyer to the Big Muddy, and I never man laid out in this hyer way afore!"

"g-gone my cats! If you can't hit 'bout as a mule kin kick!"

is point the stricken man began to show AUTHOP returning animation.

"al, he ain't dead, anyway," Bellport re-

"no," the mountain-man observed, "Sol Grundy is a tough cuss, and not the man to be wiped out by a single lick."

The defeated man opened his eyes, blinked around him for a moment, and then he rose slowly to a sitting position.

Even he was ignorant of the fact that his swoon had been caused by his head striking a stone, so dazed had he been by the terrible blow which he had received.

He cast a wondering glance at his antagonist, as much as to ask how it had been possible for him to perform such a feat, then got up.

"Time!" exclaimed the stranger, in his light and frivolous way, and as he spoke he threw himself into a boxing position and began to work his arms up and down after the most approved fashion.

"Do you take me for a hog?" growled Jim Grundy, in a sulky way.

"A hog?" said the other, questioningly.

"Yes, do you s'pose I don't know when I have got enough?"

The stranger burst into a loud laugh.

"Why, you don't mean to say that you are satisfied already?"

"Wa-al, I jest am!"

"We were only at the beginning!"

"I reckon it was the end as far as I am concerned."

"There's plenty more left in the same shop. Better have another try," the other added, persuasively.

"You know you can't always break the bank on the first bet."

"That is all right; but I ain't gambling in this game as much as I was!"

"Then you are satisfied?"

"Oh, yes, you kin bet all your wealth on that," Sol Grundy replied, in the most decided manner.

"I don't know how my head looks 'cos I ain't got a looking-glass handy, but it feels as if it was as big as a bushel basket."

"Maybe one of your pards here may think that they ought to call upon me to step up to the captain's office and settle," suggested the stranger, with a polite bow directed to the others.

The big fellow looked at the miner.

"You're Grundy's pard," he said, "sail in!"

"Not much, you bet!" replied the other, emphatically. "I ain't no hog either, and I reckon I've got enuff afore I begin!"

The stranger had made a great impression.

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRL.

THE stranger indulged in a quiet laugh.

"Oh, well, I am not spoiling for a fight," he remarked.

"I am not the kind of man to go around knocking chips off of men's shoulders just for the fun of it, yet at the same time if I happen to tread on a man's toes, and he thinks it was done with the design of giving offense, I am willing to stand up to the rack and give him all the satisfaction he wants."

"Now you are talking right out in meetin'," the big fellow remarked.

"I reckon that I kin hold my own pretty tolerable well in any sort of society I happen to git mixed up with, but I ain't going round trying to walk over men, without any reason, 'ticularly when they turn out to be as good a pilgrim as you ar'."

"Say, what is your handle, anyway?"

"My name is Edmund Burke, but perhaps I am better known as Taos Ted."

"Wa-al, I want to know!" exclaimed the other in a tone of wonder.

It was not the first time the name had fallen upon his ears, although he had never chanced to meet the wearer of it before.

Taos Ted was one of the hardy bordermen who as a scout and Indian-fighter had won a great reputation in Arizona.

Although a young man he had proved to be one of the best in his line of business of all who had ever made a name on the frontier.

Wonderfully expert in the use of all kinds of weapons, daring and dashing, brave to a fault, and gifted with almost superhuman strength, it was not strange that he was looked upon in the light of a hero.

"Pard, I am glad to meet you for I have often heard tell on yer, and, mebbe, you might have heered on me once in a while. My name is Bill Williams," the big man continued.

"Not Big Bill Williams?" the young man exclaimed in unaffected surprise.

"Wa-al, I reckon I am that ar' rooster, an no mistake!" replied the other with a grin.

And it was in truth Big Bill Williams, who at the time of which we write bore a reputation as a prairie and mountain-man second only to the great Kit Carson himself.

In the pages of history Big Bill Williams will live as one of the greatest men ever known on the border.

One of the original pioneers of civilization his life had been one series of perilous adventures and the records of his many daring deeds would fill volumes.

"I am glad to meet you and equally glad that we did not lock horns in a serious quarrel,"

observed the young man, offering his hand, in the frankest manner.

The two clasped palms and as the old mountain-man gave the other's a hearty shake, he said:

"Dog won't eat dog, you know! And two men like us who ar' in the same line ought not for to go for to jump onto each other."

"You are right there, and you must excuse my interfering with your fuss, but I've got a soft spot in my heart for women, be they old or young, and without regard to their color."

"Oh, that is all right; that's no harm done. I've got a leetle more firewater aboard than is good for me, and that is what's the matter with Hannah.

"If it hadn't been for the bug-juice I should never have thought of botherin' the gal, though I will own right up that I hate an Injun like pison, an' I've got good reason for it too, for the dusky devils have made it lively for me many a time in the last twenty years."

"And you have also made it pretty lively for them if reports be true," the young man observed.

The old mountain-man chuckled.

"Wa-al, wa-al, I reckon the red imps have never got much the best on me," he rejoined.

"Though thar is one 'tarnel painted skunk up in the mountains that I have got to settle with yet. The pison snake is a leetle ahead on me.

"Mebbe you have heared of young Mangus Colorado?"

"I have."

"He's a young buck—jest beginning to feel his oats, you know. He's one of the principal chiefs of the 'Paches in this destrict."

"His father, old Mangus, was one of the biggest red devils that ever took a scalp, and while he lived he was a head and shoulders above any red-skin in Arizona.

"He was killed by the soldiers after he had been captured, and this young Mangus got the 'dee into his head that I was to blame for his father's death, although in reality I didn't have a thing to do with it."

"So I have always understood."

"But the young cuss has got it in for me all the same, and a while ago he managed to lay me by the heels up in the mountains, an' the skunk had me tied to a tree, Ted, an' the red imps flogged me jest as if I were a durned nigger, or a no-account Greaser," and the face of the old mountain-man grew red with rage as he reflected upon the ignoble punishment which had been meted out to him.

"Well, pard, I don't wonder that you feel riled when you run across a red-skin, but perhaps this one is not an Apache," Taos Ted observed.

"Oh, yes, she ar'!" Big Bill Williams cried, decidedly. "Thar ain't no red-skins but 'Pache Injuns 'round these hyer parts, and the odds are jest 'bout a hundred to one that this hyer squaw is one of Mangus Colorado's band too, for I heered that he an' his red imps had been seen within a week or so in this neighborhood.

"An' I tell yer what it is, pard, this hyer town won't be healthy for that nigger in case I happen to met him, 'cos either he will take my scalp or I will take his'n, law or no law."

"But there is peace now between us and the Apaches," Taos Ted remarked.

"Oh, yes, thar's a heap of peace!" the old mountain-man exclaimed, contemptuously.

"A heap of peace," he repeated, "when the red niggers come into the white settlements, whar they know they will be 'tarnally wiped out if they dar' to as much as make a snoot at a miner. But you jest let a gang of the red bucks catch a white man alone up in the hills when they think that if they go for him thar won't be much chance of their being found out, an' I reckon the unfortunate cuss will diskiver that the 'Paches are on the fight red-hot."

"Why don't the miners raise a force and clean 'em out?" the young man asked.

"Wa-al, they have been talkin' 'bout doin' that ar' ever since the first strike was made in this hyer destrict, but, somehow, they never have got good an' ready for it yit.

"It was all along beerin' this hyer war talk that brought me into Black Hills City, 'cos I am jes' anxious in the worst way to get a crack at this Mangus Colorado and his band, but now that I am hyer I find that it ar' all talk an' no action—a heap of chin-music, but that is 'bout all.

"Mebbe you heered something 'bout this hyer trouble and that is what has fotched you hyer, 'cos if I ain't out in my reckonin' you have jest arrived. I disremember ever having run across you afore."

"You are right about that. I have just got

Taos Ted, the Arizona Sport.

in, but I wasn't aware that there was any likelihood of there being trouble with the Indians," Taos Ted replied.

"I heard that Black Hills City was as lively a camp as could be found in all Arizona and as I was on the lookout for a place to settle I thought I couldn't do better than to locate here for a while. And pard, you can tell me, I suppose, where I had better put up?"

"You bet!" exclaimed the old trapper. "Go to Gil Dagget's Metropolitan Hotel, tell him that I sent you an' he will take the best kind of care on you."

"I'm roomin' with my pards hyer," the big fellow added, with a dignified wave of his hand toward the two miners.

"Mighty wise pair o' gen'lemen, now I tell yer, Taos Ted, although they were anxious for to climb you, but that is all right, now; leetle mistakes of that ar' kind will happen in the best regulated communities."

"So long, I'll see you to morrow, and you, you red she imp, you kin jest thank your lucky stars that this gen'leman come along, or else you kin bet yer life I would have had that ar' blanket offen you!"

And then with a "good-night" to Taos Ted the three departed.

The Indian woman stood as rigid as a statue until the forms of the three men vanished in the darkness and then she drew her blanket away from her face, revealing to the amazed eyes of the young man the features of a beautiful a savage maiden as he had ever looked upon.

She was not over eighteen, had extremely regular features for an Indian, and her complexion was not anywhere near as dusky as the color of the majority of her race.

At the first glance a good judge in such matters would have immediately decided that the girl had considerable white blood in her veins.

Her eyes though were as dark as night and her hair as black as the wing of a crow.

She cast a glance full of contemptuous anger after the three pards, and exclaimed:

"Let the big pale-face look to himself or the knife of the red Apache chieftain, Mangus Colorado, will cut his heart in twain!"

And as she uttered the fierce speech, shaking her clinched hand in angry menace in the direction which the white men had taken, Taos Ted, gazing upon her flashing eyes and features convulsed with rage, was strongly reminded of a tigress, for there was something wild and terrible in her passion.

And then too, as he looked upon the girl the thought came to him that there was a great resemblance in her face to that of the Apache chief, young Mangus Colorado, whom he had met at Prescott a couple of years before.

Jumping at once to a conclusion he said: "You are Mangus Colorado's sister—the Indian princess, whom the Apaches call by the Mexican name of Manuelita."

CHAPTER IV. A STRANGE TALE.

FOR a moment the girl appeared undecided. She glanced after the three pards as though she was anxious to assure herself that they were really gone. Just as if she had a suspicion they might be lurking near with the idea of overhearing what she might say.

But as the girl had the eyes of a hawk—and the moon coming from behind the clouds just then gave her a chance to inspect the neighborhood—she saw there was not the slightest danger of any one playing the eavesdropper.

"Yes, I will not attempt to disguise the truth from you," she said, raising her head, proudly, and fixing upon the face of the young man the penetrating gaze of her full, dark eyes.

"I am Manuelita Colorado, sister to Mangus Colorado, and daughter of the great red chief whom the pale-face soldiers so brutally murdered when he was a helpless prisoner in their hands; but the white dogs, who dig in the earth like the musk-rat, have been made to pay dearly for the cowardly murder; for since the death of the great red chieftain many a scalp have the Apache warriors torn from the heads of the white man in revenge for the death of their great brave."

From this speech it was plain that if the Indian girl possessed the wild beauty of the panther she also had a good share of the savageness of the forest beast.

"Under the circumstances then it is fortunate that I happened to come up as I did," the young man remarked, "for, undoubtedly, Big Bill Williams would have recognized you if he had succeeded in seeing your face."

"If the big pale-face chief had tried to harm me I would have killed him on the instant!" exclaimed the girl, and as she spoke she extended

her right hand from under the blanket and displayed a revolver with the hammer raised, ready for action.

"The consequences of such a deed on your part would be apt to be pretty serious though," the plainsman warned.

"Oh, no," the girl replied with true Indian sang-froid.

"In this weapon I have six shots, and as I am as good a marksman as any brave of my tribe, I would have easily slain the other two white men after I had killed the big chief, if they had attempted to detain me, then I would have fled to the hills and not all the white braves in this valley would be able to find me."

The young man comprehended from this reasoning that he was in the presence of a girl far superior to the usual run of Indian women.

But he was not amazed at the discovery for although he had but little knowledge of this particular Black Hills branch of the Apache tribe—young Mangus Colorado being the only man of the organization whom he had ever encountered—yet rumor had told him that the Indian princess was in reality a superior creature.

"How comes it that you are called Manuelita?" he asked, curious upon this point. "Manuelita is not an Indian name."

"It was the name of my mother, who was a Mexican woman."

"Ah, I see; carried off doubtless by your father in some of his wild raids on the Mexican frontier."

"Yes, she was captured by the Apaches when a child, grew to womanhood in the Indian village, and then she became the wife of the great chief."

"But did she never wish to return to her Mexican home?"

"I do not know; I never heard her speak about it; she seemed to be satisfied, but, then, she was not treated like a common Indian squaw; she worked not, but ruled as a queen over the tribe."

"But why should she want to leave her Indian home where the free mountain winds stir the branches of the pines to go and dwell with the Mexicans in the mud-brick huts on the plains?

"Why should she wish to live with the cowardly dogs who run like a flock of sheep, scenting the coyotes on their track, at the sight of the plumed head-dress of the Apache warrior?"

The contempt that the wild red chiefs feel for the Mexicans was well known to the young man.

And the dusky-hued warriors have reason for the feeling, too, for long years of warfare have proved that the Mexicans are no match for the red braves, and, as a general rule, ten Indians will put to flight forty or fifty "Greasers."

Our hero felt considerable curiosity in regard to the girl's presence alone in the street of the mining-camp at such an hour, and so he bluntly put the question:

"How is it that you are here in the camp of the white men, alone and at this time of night?"

The girl fixed her brilliant eyes full upon the face of the young man for a moment as though she would read his very soul.

Taos Ted bore the gaze undauntedly.

Then, in a sudden burst of confidence, the Indian maiden exclaimed:

"I believe you are honest, although you wear a white skin, and I will trust my secret to you."

"If you had not been both brave and honest, you would not have interfered to-night in my behalf."

"It is not every white man who will interpose to protect an Indian girl from insult."

"Oh, as far as that goes, it is as I said to the men who were molesting you, it is against my principles to see any woman annoyed or abused, no matter what her color."

"I need a friend in whom I can confide and I have none."

"Promote me to the position and I can promise you that your confidence shall not be misplaced," Taos Ted observed in his light and airy way.

And yet, despite his flippant style, there was an earnestness in his words which made the girl believe he could be trusted.

"You are a stranger, and yet my instinct tells me that if I confide in you I will not have cause to repent it."

"I do not think you will," the young man replied.

"Our acquaintance has begun in an odd way, but for all that there isn't the least reason why we shouldn't be the best of friends."

"It is true. It seems to me as if it was the hand of fate which brought us together, and I

shall not hesitate to avail myself of your services."

The young plainsman was impressed by the ease and fluency with which she conversed in English, and made a remark to that effect, and the Indian princess explained that she had been educated by a missionary who had once undertaken the hopeless task of bringing Mangus Colorado and his band under the refining influences of civilization.

Although the ruthless red chief took no "stock" in the God of the white men, yet he was not slow to perceive it would be an advantage to have his daughter educated, and so he placed no obstacles in the way.

After the explanation, Manuelita asked abruptly:

"Do you know Boston Bob?"

"No, I do not. You must remember I am a stranger here, and have just struck the town, so do not know anybody in the place unless I should happen to run across some old acquaintances."

"This Boston Bob is the keeper of a saloon called the All Night Ranch."

"I can give a guess at the character of the place from the name."

"It is the leading saloon of the town, and this Boston Bob is one of the principal men in the camp."

"He is a tall and handsome chief, with a jet-black beard and an eye like an eagle!" the girl exclaimed in an impulsive way, and the plainsman immediately came to the conclusion that he could guess how matters stood.

"I think I comprehend the situation," he remarked.

"This white chief is a sort of a lover of yours."

"I saved his life in the mountain when with unloaded rifle he was at the mercy of an enraged bear he had irritated with a shot which only wounded instead of killing the beast."

"I arrived just in time to save him, and should not he belong to me?"

"Well, you most certainly have a pretty good claim."

"He professed the most unbounded gratitude, and we often secretly met after that time, and soon he began to vow that there wasn't a woman in the world whom he loved as well as he did me."

"But, true to the traditions of my race, I did not yield implicit faith to his words, and though he pleaded hard for me to accept him as a lover, yet I did not."

"I was wise, for the arrival of a strange white girl, with hair as yellow as the waving corn, and eyes blue as the sky, has made him forget the Indian maid to whom he owes his life."

"It is now one moon—a month, as you white men reckon—since this girl came to the camp."

"Before that time, almost every day Boston Bob would take his gun and seek the mountains on the hunt for game, as he pretended; but as he said to me, many, many times, he came so that he might gain speech with the woman who had saved his life."

"And since the arrival of this other girl he hasn't wanted game as much as he did, eh?" queried our hero.

"No, I have not seen him. This girl he has given a place in his ranch. She sells cigars and tobacco there, but she and her father live in that cabin yonder," and the Indian girl pointed to a log hut, a hundred yards or so away.

"I have heard that Boston Bob sees her home every night when the saloon closes, and so I came and bid here that I might see with my own eyes whether it is the truth or not."

"And if it is the truth?"

"Then I will return satisfied to my mountain home and will never again believe the words of any of the treacherous white men!" the girl exclaimed with savage dignity.

"Hold on! you are a leetle unjust; you mustn't judge all men by one!"

"Hush! I hear footsteps!" cried the girl, abruptly. "Let us conceal ourselves so we will not be observed."

CHAPTER V.

A HAZARDOUS MISSION.

SHE grasped the young man by the arm and he, willing to humor the whim, sunk amid the bushes, following her example.

Their presence in the bushes could only be discovered by some one coming within a few yards of the spot, as the three pards had happened to do.

But there was not the least chance of their

presence being suspected by any one coming straight to the cabin indicated by the Indian girl.

The marvelous hearing of the Apache princess had not deceived her.

There were people approaching from the center of the town, as Taos Ted soon was able to distinguish, but skilled as he was in prairie craft, he lacked the marvelous ears and eyes of the Apache princess.

Circumstances favored the watchers, for as the new-comers approached the moon shone out free and clear, so they were able to get a good look.

The Indian girl was right in her conjecture, as the young man was able to see when the others came in sight, for it was an easy matter to recognize Boston Bob by his short, black beard, and the old gentleman with the gray hair and the mutton-chop side-whiskers of the same hue, although in spite of his coarse clothing presenting an extremely gentlemanly appearance, was evidently the girl's father.

And the girl herself.

As the young man gazed upon her he did not wonder that she had won the attentions of the owner of the All Night Ranch from the Indian maid, for she was as beautiful a girl as he had ever looked upon—a woman well calculated to win the heart of any man not steeled, hermit-like, against all female charms.

She was a little above the medium height and magnificently formed; a very queen in bearing, with finely cut, regular features and a great wealth of yellow hair.

"The story is true—she is a beautiful creature!" the Indian girl muttered, the speech evidently costing her a pang of pain.

"Yes, just such a woman as would be apt to kick up a deal of disturbance in any town of this kind in which she concluded to locate," the young plainsman observed.

During his residence on the frontier he had been an eye-witness to the trouble which the presence of such a handsome woman as this glorious creature could create in a mining-camp.

The lady was not walking between the two gentlemen, as is usually the case under such circumstances, but she was on the outside, her father being in the center.

But as the three came on the reason for this was soon apparent; the old gentleman was so much under the influence of liquor as not to be able to walk without assistance.

A look of contempt appeared on the face of the savage maiden when she made this discovery.

She had the true savage contempt for the man who allowed himself to be overcome by the potent fire-water of the white skins.

And the young man, although he did not put his thoughts into words, reflected that a drunken father would not be able to be much of a protector to a girl if circumstances arose so that she stood in need of one.

When the party reached the cabin, the girl gave Boston Bob the key and he unlocked the padlock, which, fastened to two staples, secured the door—the usual mode of securing the doors of the mountain cabins when the occupants are absent, for locks in these frontier settlements are few and far between.

Then he assisted to help the old man into the house and lit a candle; the door of the cabin was so located that the pair in ambush had a good view of all that transpired within the house through the open doorway.

After the candle was lit and he had got the old man into a chair, propping him up against the table so there wasn't any danger of his falling, Boston Bob asked the girl if there was anything else he could do.

And the manner of the good-looking, polished gambler when he addressed the girl was as courteous as though she had been a queen.

"Nothing more, thank you," replied the lady in one of those rare, rich voices the tones of which go straight to the heart.

"I have already sufficiently taxed your kindness and I feel sure I never shall be able to repay you for all you have done for me," she continued.

"Oh, don't mention it, I beg!" he replied, gallantly. "I am only too happy in being able to be of the slightest service to you."

"You are quite sure I can't be of any further assistance?"

"No, thank you."

"I will say good-night, then," and the stalwart gambler, lifting the jaunty-looking, broad-brimmed white hat which he wore, bowed in the most respectful manner, and then took his departure, retracing his footsteps with the free

and careless tread of a man who felt at peace with himself and all the world.

The girl watched him for a moment and then shut the cabin door and the watchers could plainly hear her putting up the stout bars which were used to fasten the door upon the inside.

The young man glanced at his companion.

Upon her features was a sullen look, rage and despair blended, and Taos Ted easily comprehended that she was more deeply affected by the discovery that the dashing white man had been won from his allegiance to her than she cared to own.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked, finding that she was not disposed to speak.

"I am," she replied, with bitter accent.

"The white man is a snake, and he has lied to me, but it matters not.

"I am only angry because I was fool enough to believe that the tongue of a white man could speak the truth.

"I ought to have known better."

"You are not particularly complimentary, I must say."

"It is the truth, though, where an Indian is concerned," the girl retorted.

"You white men may be truthful with each other, but when you come to deal with the Indian your mouths are always full of lies!" the red princess declared, indignantly.

"That is a wholesale accusation, Manuelita, and I for one protest against it!" the plainsman exclaimed.

"As far as I am individually concerned, I can say with truth that I have always kept my word with an Indian as well as with a white man, and if you will question those who know me best, they will tell you that Taos Ted has always borne the reputation of being a truthful man."

Earnest was the gaze which the big black eyes of the Indian princess fixed upon the face of the young man, but he bore the scrutiny without flinching.

"I believe you!" the Apache girl exclaimed, abruptly, after quite a long pause.

"I believe that you are honest, and will not betray any trust that I may confide to you."

"Well, I am not the kind of man to boast much in regard to myself, but I think you will find that I am almost as square as they make 'em nowadays; anyway, that is the reputation I have."

"Will you do me a service?" the girl asked, after another pause, during which she seemed to be busy in meditation.

"Yes, if I can."

Taos Ted was frank and impulsive by nature, and he had taken a decided fancy to the Indian maid whose acquaintance he had made in so odd a manner.

"In the old time, when the white men first began to come into Apache land, and there was bloody and unrelenting war whenever the red-men and the white-skins met, often the Apaches were not able to procure lead with which to run bullets for their guns, and so they used the yellow metal—the gold, which was the magnet that attracted the pale faces into the country of the red-men," the girl remarked.

"Yes, I have often heard that tale repeated," the plainsman observed.

"The golden bullets of the Apaches are renowned all along the whole line of the frontier."

"The red chiefs sometimes quarreled among themselves and on one occasion my father, the great Mangus Colorado, was challenged by another chief, and as their supply of leaden bullets had become exhausted the duel was fought with golden ones."

"Both the braves were great warriors, and reputed to be the best marksmen in the tribe."

"Each took deadly aim, determined to kill the other, but the great Wahcondah would not have it so."

"The gold bullets met in the air and the two became one."

"At this signal proof that the Great Spirit was offended by the fight the warriors ceased their contest and became the best of friends."

"To my father, who was the older warrior, were the bullets given. To me, his daughter, they descended, and I, like a foolish child, allowed this false white man to cut the blended bullets in two because he begged that he might have one half as a token."

Then from an inner pocket of the buckskin shirt which she wore, the girl produced a half of the two golden bullets which, rushing through the air, had encountered each other and the force of the shock had fused them together in one solid mass.

It was a curious thing, and Boston Bob, when he cut the token in two, separated it in such a

manner that each part contained a half of the two bullets.

"It is odd, but I have seen two leaden bullets thus united," was Taos Ted's comment.

"Now, will you take my half of the token, go to Boston Bob, and on my behalf demand the return of the other part?"

"Eh, what is that?" exclaimed the young man astonished at the unexpected request.

"It is a talisman," continued the girl.

"There is not a brave in our tribe but reveres the twin bullets, and any white man who possesses a part of the token is as safe in Apache land from any attack by the red braves, as in the middle of this mining-camp."

"Recover the token and you shall have it and thus the Apache girl will testify her gratitude for the service which you render her to-night."

"Yes, but my charming Manuelita, you don't seem to consider that you are putting me in the way of a first-class quarrel."

"I take it from his appearance that this Boston Bob is no slouch, to use our expressive westernism, and, in my opinion, the chances are about a hundred to one that when I tell him you have deputized me to get the golden token, he will reply by stating that it isn't any business of mine, and I had better attend to my own affairs or I may get in trouble."

The Indian girl regarded the young man intently for a moment, and there was a haughty curl to her proud lip.

"If you fear to undertake the task you need not do so," she remarked, disdainfully.

"Fear?" and Taos Ted laughed merrily as he spoke. "Now, my beautiful Apache princess you mustn't be so quick at jumping to conclusions. I didn't say that I was afraid to ask Boston Bob to return your keepsake. I merely wanted to know if you comprehended the consequence that might follow such a request?"

"I suppose he will not like it," the girl remarked slowly, and with a dark look on her face.

"No, I don't believe he will. If the demand came directly from you in person, it would be another matter, but it is always awkward to manage such a thing as this by proxy."

"Now, Manuelita, although I am a heedless, happy-go-lucky fellow, yet anybody who tries to fry me for a fool will be apt to lose their fat, to use the old saying."

"You must not think that I take you to be a fool," the Apache girl replied, an odd look upon her face, which seemed to imply that she did not know exactly what to make of the man from Taos.

"Oh, no, but yet you are going to try and use me as a means to wreak your revenge upon your recreant lover."

"You know well enough that such a man as this Boston Bob will be apt to be ugly when a stranger, such as I am to him, comes and demands the love-token which he received from you."

"Perhaps he will."

"The chances are a thousand to one that it will be so, and you know it!" Taos Ted exclaimed decidedly.

"So don't try to pull the wool over my eyes, because you mustn't fool yourself with the idea that such trick can be done."

"This is a very crafty scheme of yours, and shows you to be a worthy daughter of old Mangus Colorado, who had the head of a statesman."

"One white man has offended you, and you intend through the aid of another to get square with him."

"You need not undertake the task if you do not like it!" the girl exclaimed haughtily.

"Think you if I really cared enough about the slight which has been put upon me to hunger for revenge that I could not with my own hand avenge myself?"

"Not the least doubt in regard to that!"

"I give the task to you because I believe you to be both brave and true; you see, though I have been deceived by one white man, yet I am willing to trust another."

"And on mighty short acquaintance, too," observed our hero with a laugh.

"Recover the token and then ask what you will of Manuelita, and if it is in her power to grant it, you shall be satisfied."

"Good! that is a bargain, and here's my hand upon it!" exclaimed Taos Ted, extending his small, well-formed, but muscular hand.

The two clasped palms and then the Indian girl gathered her blanket around her.

"For the present, farewell," she said.

"A short distance up the trail is a pine forest—"

"Yes, I noticed it as I came along."

"Three nights hence I will meet you there at the rising of the moon."

"All right! I will be on hand."

And then they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CAMP.

THE Indian maiden went up the trail toward the North, while Taos Ted took his way toward the center of the camp.

Ten minutes' walk brought him to the place he sought, the hotel to which he had been recommended by Big Bill Williams.

There wasn't any possibility of mistaking the place, for the hotel was the largest building in the camp, although it was but little more than a rude, two-story shanty, but it was ornamented with a coat of whitewash, and across the front in big black letters was the inscription:

METROPOLITAN HOTEL.

GIL DAGGETT.

And right next door to the hotel was Boston Bob's All Night Ranch.

As the young man had surmised from the name, Boston Bob's place was one of the peculiar houses of amusement only to be found on the outskirts of civilization.

It was a saloon, restaurant and gaming-house combined.

The gambling part of the establishment though was far more extensive than the rest, and as Taos Ted approached he saw that the "shebang," as such places are usually termed in the wild West, was in full blast.

It was not necessary for him to enter the saloon to be able to see what was going on within, for the door was wide open, there were no curtains to the windows, and any one standing in the street without had a full view of all that was going on within.

In the mining-camps of the West, and on the Pacific Slope, when men desire to drink and gamble they do not consider it necessary to hide behind closed doors and drawn curtains.

Then, too, in a mining-camp like this, such a place is like the general country-store of a small village, where, after work hours are over, the neighbors meet to exchange the gossip of the day, and many a man whiles away an hour or two at night in such a place, and yet never patronizes the bar nor risks his money in any game of chance.

From his post of observation the young man could see the good-looking gambler, chatting with a group of friends, and at the same time keeping a good lookout upon the running of the establishment.

The All Night Ranch was the only place open in the camp, with the exception of the hotel, and that was deserted, only one man being visible, a jolly-looking, stout, middle-aged man, who was smoking a pipe, and whom Taos Ted guessed to be the landlord.

Entering the hotel the young man accosted the smoker.

"Is the landlord around?"

"I reckon I'm the man," answered the other, who was Gil Daggett in person.

"I have just arrived in the camp and Big Bill Williams recommended me to your house."

"Glad to see you!" exclaimed the landlord, rising to his feet and shaking the other heartily by the hand.

"Any friend of Big Bill Williams is welcome in this ar' ranch at any time, and you kin bet all your wealth on that, too!"

"How may I call your handle?"

"Burke—Edmund Burke. I hail from Taos originally and some of the lads of the outfit I war with dubbed me Taos Ted, and the name has kinder stuck to me ever since."

"Yes, yes, that is the way it always happens, but I think I have heard of you before, Mister Burke."

"Wasn't you mixed up in an Injun fight down nigh the New Mexico line?"

"I was."

"And you kinder made a big name for yourself if I remember the thing right?"

"Yes, I believe I managed to hold my end up, as the saying is," the other answered carelessly.

"I reckon you did from all I heered!" chuckled the landlord.

"Will you h'ist a leetle p'ison with me?"

"I should be glad of a glass of ale after my walk. My mule gave out and I had to leave the beast at a ranch about ten miles up the trail."

"Yes, yes, I know the place, Mickey Doolin's ranch!"

"I believe that is the name."

"A red-headed Irishman!"

"Yes."

"Well, Mickey will fetch the beast 'round if anybody can."

Then the two drank their ale, for the host was an Englishman and partial to the brew of the hop, and then the landlord pressed his guest to sit down and have a smoke before he went to bed.

This was exactly what Taos Ted wanted for he knew he could ascertain from the landlord all the particulars which it was important for him to know.

So after they were comfortably seated, and Taos Ted got his cigar in full operation, he remarked:

"You seem to have a pretty lively camp here."

"Oh, yes, the town is booming right along. You couldn't strike a more lively place in all Arizona!"

"That seems to be quite an establishment, that All Night Ranch next door?"

"Yes, that is a pretty good gag, as the boys say," the landlord remarked.

"Well, is there really business enough to warrant it in keeping open all night?"

"Oh, no, that's only a name, that's all; the thing plays out about one o'clock, generally."

"But Boston Bob—that is the name of the man who runs the place—is a feller chock-full of sand, and he is always willing to keep the game running as long as there are players."

"I see; he wants to please his patrons."

"Yes, and his motto is that no man with money to lose need go elsewhere. He will accommodate him while his ducats hold out."

"That is fair enough."

"Oh, yes, he don't freeze any galoot out by shutting up just as the man gets interested and is going to break the bank or go bu'st!"

"I took a look in there before I came in," our hero remarked, carelessly, "and I had an idea that the tall, good-looking fellow with the short, black beard was the proprietor."

"You have hit it—that's Boston Bob!"

"Is he from Boston, that the all call him by that name?"

"Oh, no, that is only a fancy of the boys, you know," the landlord replied.

"Bob is a pretty close-mouthed feller; he don't go 'round shooting off his horn in regard to where he comes from, or what little adventures he has had."

"He don't do business in that ar' way. I reckon nobody in this hyar camp ever heered him own up to much about himself."

"What is his name?"

"Robert Templeton."

"Quite a high-sounding appellation."

"Yes, that is the way it struck the boys when he first came into camp. He kinder loafed 'round hyar a month or so before he went into this shebang."

"He's a regular sport, you know, by profession; a first-class card sharp, just the best by long odds that ever struck this camp, and he's got such a polite way with him, so different from the general run of men that you meet with in towns like this hyar, that old Doc Sawbones, who has got more brains than any other two men in the town, said he reckoned he must have come from Boston, because he had so much culture about him."

"Ah, I see. I've heard of the Boston men before, and I reckon they are 'way up to the top of the heap when you come to culture and politeness," Taos Ted remarked, reflectively.

"So old Sawbones allowed, and I tell you what the old rascal of a doctor don't know 'bout matters and things ain't worth knowing."

"That is a funny name, Sawbones."

"Yes, bless you, but that ain't his right name, you know."

"I should suppose not."

"But what his name really is by rights is more than anybody in this hyar camp knows," the landlord remarked, confidentially.

"He's been a first-class doctor in some one of the big Eastern cities, and people reckon that he got into trouble in some way, and had to get out between two days."

"Such little accidents will happen sometimes."

"Yes, you see the Doc is an awful fellow for liquor, and although he can stand more than any other man in the camp, yet every once in a while he gets so full that he don't know which end he is standing on, and when he gets full 'tain't safe to call him in to attend to a sick man, for when he is in liquor he allers wants to get out his knives and saws and go to cutting."

"It don't matter what the trouble is with the man either; if he was called to a feller who had the colic, the first thing he would do would be

to whip out his knife and go for to cut the man's arm or leg off."

"Nice kind of a doctor."

"Yes; but he's all right when he is sober, and then, when he is told about these fits of his'n, he allers gets off some big saying 'bout 'when the wine is in the wits are out,' or something of that sort."

"He must be an odd fish."

"He is as odd as they make 'em."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LANDLORD'S STORY.

THERE was silence for a few minutes, and the two men smoked away; Taos Ted cogitating how he should introduce the subject of the beautiful girl, so as to gain some information in regard to her.

The landlord saved him the trouble though by speaking about her himself.

"Yes, sir-ee," he said, "Boston Bob is jest the biggest gentleman that you can skeer up anywhere around these parts, and though he is a gambler and feeds on pilgrims, so to speak, yet he is jest as nice and square a man as there is in the town."

"There are three or four other games running, you know, but there isn't one of them that is run on the square—they are all skins but his'n, and that is the reason why he catches the crowd, every time!"

"I can understand that readily enough," the other observed.

"Gambling is something that I seldom indulge in, but when I play I always want a square deal for my money."

"Sart'in! that is human nature the world over. Oh, I tell you, Boston Bob is as smart as they make 'em!"

"Say, have you jest come?"

"Yes, only a few minutes ago."

"Then you didn't see that gay cashier that Boston Bob has got?"

"No, I don't think I did," the man from Taos replied, carelessly, although he guessed that the speaker referred to the beautiful girl, and he was all impatience to learn all the particulars in regard to her.

"Well, when Boston Bob got hold of this hyer cashier, he made a ten-strike as sure as you are born. The cashier is a gal!"

"A girl, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and as fine a one as you ever laid yer eyes upon—a rip-staving beauty, and no mistake."

"Well, that is a novelty!"

"Oh, you bet it is; and she is a lady, too; none of your common stock—no song-and-dance gal, or any such fry as that, but blue blood, sir, from 'way-back!"

"You really surprise me."

"I'll tell you the hull story, and you kin jest bet it is worth the telling."

"Of course you will keep it dark, 'cos I shouldn't like to have it get out, you know, that I blowed on the gal," and the old landlord laid his hand impressively on the knee of the young man.

"Oh, you can rely upon my discretion; I am no talker."

"Well, I reckoned you warn't, and I don't often make a mistake 'bout such matters."

"You see, I have been running a hotel for over thirty years now, commencing in the States and gradually working westward, and I reckon I kin read human nature 'bout as well as any man you kin scare up."

"I should certainly think you ought to be a first-class judge."

"Well, I reckon I am 'bout as good as you will be likely to pick up in a long day's journey," the landlord responded in a self-satisfied tone.

"But to come to my yarn."

"Jest 'bout two weeks ago this gal and her father arrived in the camp."

"Chivers is their name—Colonel William Chivers, the old man calls himself, and the gal's name is Arabella; but as I s'pose she thinks that sounds kinder old-fashioned, she calls herself Belle."

"That is much prettier than the other, to my thinking," the young man observed.

"Well, that is all a matter of taste. I like Arabella the best; but then, I am a kinder old-fashioned rooster."

"The colonel is a gentleman, you see, just as much as the darter is a lady, and is as high-toned a-looking old buck as you could find in any of the big Eastern towns."

"The kind of man, you know, that you would pick out for a bank president or the head of some insurance company."

"The plainsman nodded.

Having seen the eminently respectable-look-

ing old gentleman, he was able to appreciate the landlord's description.

"Well, my friend, I was struck all of a heap when such a high-toned swell, with such a gal, made their appearance in a camp like this."

"The old cuss got off a cock-and-bull story 'bout how his doctor had ordered him to come to this part of the country for his health, but I knew that was a yarn, of course."

"There was only one reasonable explanation, you see. The old rooster had got into difficulties in the East somewhere, and had been obliged to get out, 'cos, although he came into town with considerable swagger, yet I felt pretty sart' in he didn't have any more money than he knew what to do with."

"Of course, a man like yourself can always give a shrewd guess about a thing of that kind," Taos Ted observed.

"Yes, and it ain't often that I am far out of the way, either."

"Well, in jest about two days the old man's secret was out. The colonel was a slave to liquor."

"Is it possible?" the plainsman exclaimed, although he was prepared for this disclosure by the scene which he had witnessed that night.

"You bet all your rocks on it! He wasn't no drinker though like old Sawbones who kin stand up to the bar and put a pint of whisky under his jacket and walk off without hardly showing it; two or three glasses upset the colonel's apple-cart and made a weak, stupid old jackass of him."

"The second night he was here he got full and sailed into the All Night Ranch, tackled the faro table, and inside of an hour 'blew in,' all the wealth he had, including some of his gal's rings, which it seemed had belonged to her dead mother."

"You don't say so? The miserable old scoundrel!" Taos Ted exclaimed.

"It is as true as that I am sitting hyer!" the landlord protested.

"There was an awful time when he came home and let on to the gal what he had done. I had given 'em rooms right next to mine, so as they both talked loud I overheard every word they said."

"As it happened, Boston Bob wasn't in the place when the old man tackled the game, and he didn't know anything 'bout it until it was all over, 'cos he wouldn't have let the old man play; you see Boston was kinder taken with the gal the first time he saw her, which was when she arrived in the stage."

"And he would have been disposed to play the hero for the sake of making himself solid with the girl," Taos Ted observed, shrewdly.

"That is just exactly what he did do!" the other exclaimed.

"How so?"
He came into his saloon about half-an-hour arter the old man had been cleaned out and when he learned all the particulars, daru me if he didn't take the money and jewelry that the old cuss had blown in at the faro table, and came right into this hotel with them and axed if he couldn't see the gal!"

"That was a bold and skillful movement!" the plainsman observed, approvingly.

"Oh, you can bet your boots that Boston Bob is no slouch!" the landlord declared.

"From my room, as I told you, I could hear every word that was said in the other."

"Boston Bob talked more like a preacher-man than a gambler!"

"Oh, you kin bet all your wealth that he worked the trick to the queen's taste!"

"He told the girl that he reckoned her father had got a leetle excited—that was a polite way of saying that he was as drunk as blazes—and that his men had no right to allow him to play, and, seeing how things were, he had taken the liberty to bring back the money and little trinkets which the colonel had gambled away."

"Very nicely put indeed!"

"The gal was chock-full of pride though, and at first she wouldn't listen to no such thing, but Boston Bob talked so nicely—and as Irishmen would say, 'he has a tongue that would coax a bird off a bush,' so at last she consented to take the plunder."

"And what did the colonel have to say in regard to the matter?"

"Nary a word, he went fast asleep in his chair right after Boston Bob came in."

"Then arter the gal concluded to take back the things, Boston Bob made bold to ax her what her father thought of doing in this camp, for as he delicately put it, 'a man like your father will not be satisfied to remain idle!'"

"Now this broke the gal all up and she had to blurt out, 'Heaven help us! what will my

father find to do hyer or anywhere else as long as be is a slave to this demon, liquor!'

"Then Boston Bob got in his fine work.

"He had a good deal of trouble about money in his place he explained. When he wasn't there in person he felt sure he didn't get as much cash as he ought to; he had thought for a long time of putting in a cashier to handle the money, and he would be just delighted if he could get a lady like herself to accept the position.

"He knew, he said, it wasn't just such a position as she would be apt to select if she had a choice, but he would assure her that he would do his best to make things pleasant and she could rest assured that no one should molest her in any way."

"He talked like a Dutch uncle," Taos Ted observed.

"Oh, you bet it was right up to the mark!" the landlord declared.

"And he wound up by saying that he could afford to give her twenty dollars a week, find meals both for herself and father, and give them the use of a cabin which he owned on the outskirts of the camp. You passed it, by the way, as you came in to-night."

The plainsman nodded.

"Well, to wind up, she accepted the offer—it it abruptly, you know, as if she didn't want to deliberate over the matter for fear she would be compelled to refuse. In fact, it was that or starvation in time, and she knew it."

"And now you have the story. Let's have another glass of ale and then we will go to bed."

The ale was drank, and Taos Ted was shown to his room, his mind full of strange fancies.

CHAPTER VIII.

WILLIAMS'S WARNING.

TAOS TED was an early riser and he was up by six in the morning, which was just about the time that the camp began to show signs of life.

The young plainsman had reflected deeply in regard to the task which he had undertaken, and the more he thought about the matter, the deeper became his conviction that he had acted rashly in allowing himself to become entangled in the affair.

As he sat upon the side of the little cot bed—the only piece of furniture the room could boast—after he had finished his simple toilet, he began to cross-examine himself in regard to the matter.

Like the most of men who lead solitary lives he had fallen into the habit of talking to himself.

"Now, then, Edmund Burke, otherwise known as Taos Ted, as you are an honest man, on your oath, mind you, what on earth induced you to bother your head with this matter?

"What is this Indian girl to you?"

"Why should you get into a quarrel with one of the best men in this camp of Black Hills City merely to gratify the caprices of this Apache princess, who, although as handsome as a panther is almost as savage as one, despite the fact that she has received the education of a Christian."

"The answer to the riddle is not a difficult one."

"It is because you have been fascinated by this red queen."

"You are a man, and, with all a man's folly, have allowed yourself to fall in love with a woman who will not be apt to bring you anything but unhappiness."

"What, then, as a wise and prudent man, should you do under the circumstances?"

"Withdraw from the affair altogether—cast off the trammels of this dangerous fascination, and tell the red beauty, plainly, that if she has wrongs to redress, she ought to call upon some of her red brothers to undertake the task for her?"

"Yes, there isn't the least doubt that such a course would be both wise and prudent, but, as men in such matters as this, as a rule, are neither wise nor prudent, but listen more to the vaporings of parsons than to the calm voice of wisdom, so will I act."

"I gave my word to Manuelita to demand the golden token from this Boston Bob, and I will keep faith with the girl, although now that I have had time to calmly reflect upon the matter, I begin to perceive that I acted somewhat rashly in allowing the girl to entrap me into giving any such promise."

"And yet, I am the man who has always possessed the reputation of having an old head on young shoulders."

"In this case, though, there isn't the least doubt that I have acted as foolishly as the greatest greenhorn that ever struck the frontier."

"A tenderfoot, fresh from the brick walls of one of the big Eastern cities, couldn't have been taken into camp in a more scientific manner."

"But I am in for it, and my name is not Taos Ted if I don't see the thing through, although I know I ought not to."

Having come to this decision, the young plainsman proceeded down-stairs and got his breakfast.

The meal ended, Taos Ted exchanged a few remarks with the landlord and then sallied forth.

It was about seven o'clock now, and, as our hero had anticipated, the All Night Ranch was not open.

It was one of those saloons where but little business was done during the day, for the camp had not yet attained sufficient importance to warrant the place in running a "day game," and the only patronage the saloon received during the day was in the eating and drinking departments.

So Taos Ted took a stroll through the town, had a talk with the miners engaged at work on the hillside and by the stream on the outskirts of the camp, so whiling away an hour, and then returned.

The All Night Ranch was just opening its doors when Taos Ted approached.

Through the open doorway the plainsman could see the man he sought, Boston Bob, eating his breakfast.

"It is not quite the cheese to disturb him at his meal," the young man observed, so he took a chair in the hotel office until the sharp should get through.

Taos Ted had hardly seated himself when along came Big Bill Williams and the two miners with whom the plainsman had had the trouble on the preceding evening.

The old mountain-man hailed our hero in the most friendly manner, and although Sol Grundy was a little cold in his salutation—and little wonder, for his face plainly betrayed where the plainsman's terrible blow had fallen—yet no one from the bearing of the three would have been apt to suspect that they and the young stranger were not on the best of terms.

Big Bill Williams insisted upon "treating," and then the two miners went off to their work, leaving the young plainsman and the old mountain-man together.

"I s'pose you will be looking around to-day for an opening?" Big Bill Williams observed.

"Yes, I shall keep my eyes open."

"Reckon to buy a claim?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You will have to look out mighty sharp, for thar are a lot of claims for sale that ain't worth the powder to blow 'em to thunder!"

"I tell yer! you have got to keep yer eyes peeled or you will get stuck with some of them skins."

"Oh, you can be sure I shall examine into the matter pretty thoroughly before I invest any money," Taos Ted remarked.

"I am no greenhorn, no tenderfoot pilgrim, to be picked up for a flat by any of these mining sharks."

"Wa-al, I should say that a man like yourself ought to be able to take keer of number one."

"Yes, and as I was brought up among mines and miners I have about as good a knowledge of mining business as any man you will be apt to run across."

"Then they won't skin you for a flat."

"No, I don't believe they will, unless the mining sharps in this camp are a keener lot than I have been accustomed to dealing with."

"You'll find them to be as big a lot of sharks as you kin run into anywhar, I reckon," was the old mountain-man's reply.

"But this feller wot runs the ranch next door is a putty squar' sort of a cuss, and he is 'bout the biggest speculator in mining claims in the camp."

"Do you mean Boston Bob?"

"He's the man!"

"And has he claims for sale?"

"More than any other one man in the camp. He's about as squar' as any man in the town, too. Nice feller to do business with, for he is a sweet talker, and yet when it comes to ugly work I reckon he's a whale, and you kin bet on it!"

"Not the kind of a man you would pick out to have fun with," Taos Ted observed with a smile.

"Not much, by a jugful!" Big Bill Williams replied, emphatically.

"Now you are a pretty good man, I take it, but you can't call yourself the boss of this town until you have downed Boston Bob."

"Well, I am going to see the man as soon as he gets through his breakfast and I will size him up."

"He peels big, so look out for him," was the old mountain-man's warning, as Taos Ted departed.

CHAPTER IX.

INTERVIEWING THE SHARP.

As Taos Ted had anticipated, Boston Bob had finished his breakfast, and, having lighted a cigar, seated himself to have a look at the newspaper which had been brought in by the stage coach on the preceding evening.

This mail-coach, running once a week, was the connecting link between this solitary outpost of civilization and the great world.

Besides Boston Bob there was only the bartender in the saloon, and he was busy attending to his duties behind the bar, so the coast was clear for the man from Taos to address the sport.

The young plainsman entered the saloon and said "good-morning" to Boston Bob in the pleasantest manner.

The sport, who was well acquainted with all the inhabitants of the camp, saw at once that the other was a stranger, but greeted him cordially, for every new-comer helped business, although he personally might not pay tribute to the coffers of the All Night Ranch.

Then, too, the sharp-eyed sport was inclined to be more than usually polite to this particular stranger, for, with his usual acuteness, he detected that this man was far superior to the common run of pilgrims.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing the proprietor of the All Night Ranch?" asked Taos Ted politely.

"I am the party, I believe."

"The gentleman who is sometimes called Boston Bob?"

"Yes, that is the handle the boys of the camp have attached to me, and I have grown so accustomed to be thus addressed that I have almost forgotten I have any other name."

"I should like to have the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with you in private."

"In private!" exclaimed Boston Bob, both his tone and manner showing that the request was entirely unexpected by him.

"Yes, if you will be so kind."

"Humph! your business must be of a particular nature then?"

"It is."

"All right, I will accommodate you. Have the kindness to follow me."

"Certainly."

Boston Bob laid aside his paper, arose and led the way to the rear of the saloon, where there was a small room partitioned off from the main apartment for the accommodation of private card parties, and rumor reported that some of the biggest games of poker which had ever been played in the camp had taken place within the walls of this apartment.

This room only occupied in width one-half of the space of the front apartment, and by its side was another room of about the same size; this was the private apartment of the proprietor, and to it no one was admitted but his intimate associates.

Boston Bob conducted Taos Ted to the private card-room, invited him to be seated and said:

"Now, my dear sir, fire away with your business as soon as you like."

The two men seated themselves, one on each side of the table, which was in the center of the apartment.

Taos Ted was a man who believed in coming directly to the point, and so he proceeded at once to the object of his mission.

Drawing from his pocket the portion of the blended bullets which the Apache princess had intrusted to him, he displayed it in the palm of his hand, much to the astonishment of Boston Bob, who was totally unprepared for such a thing.

Despite all his coolness and self-control, there was a decided look of amazement upon his face as he looked upon the little, misshapen bit of gold.

"Did you ever see anything like this before?" Taos Ted asked quietly.

The gambler took a good look at the token, and then at the face of his questioner, before he made reply.

His instincts told him that something out of the common was about to occur, but he did not exactly know what to expect.

"Yes, I think I have seen something like that article," he said, in answer to the question. "But what of it?"

"If I mistake not, the other part of these two bullets is in your possession."

Boston Bob's face became dark at once. He did not like the direction which the conversation was taking.

"Well, what if it is? What is it to you, or to anybody else, for that matter?"

"I don't know as it can be any concern to anybody else, but it is to me."

"To you?"

And the frown on Boston Bob's face deepened.

"Yes, to me," Taos Ted answered, firmly, but not offensively.

"Well, I must admit that you astonish me, for I can't understand how the matter can possibly concern you in the least."

"The explanation is a simple one."

"You recognize this token?"

"Yes, I don't see as there is any harm in admitting that."

"And you doubtless can remember in whose possession the article was when you last saw it?"

"Oh, yes, not the least doubt about that."

"Well, that party who gave the half of the joined bullets to you—or rather, to be perfectly accurate, allowed you to cut the token in two with your knife and bear away one-half—gave to me the other half, so that you would be able to understand that I came directly from and had authority to represent her."

"She desires you to return the token which she allowed you to take away."

The face of Boston Bob grew black as night, and he surveyed the young adventurer for a moment before he replied, and then, roughly, he cried:

"Upon my soul! I think this is about as cool a thing as I ever heard of!"

"Well, I don't know about that," Taos Ted replied, perfectly unruffled.

"As far as I can see there isn't anything odd or out-of-the-way about the thing."

"The party wanted the token back; she didn't care to come and ask for it herself, and so she deputed me, allowing me to take the other half of the bullets so that you might understand that I had her authority for the request."

"Yes, but you don't seem to understand that this is a delicate matter!" Boston Bob exclaimed, both in tone and face showing decided traces of temper.

"Oh, you make a big mistake when you say that! I understand all about it, but I got kinder roped into the thing before I knew what was up, and having got in, the only way was for me to put the job through."

"Well, now, see here, mister—how may I call your name, by the way, for I believe you are a stranger to this camp?"

"Yes, you are right there, for I only arrived last night. My name is Edmund Burke, although like yourself and a good many other men, I have had another handle given me, by which I am better known than by my own name, and that is Taos Ted."

As it happened, the sport had never chanced to hear of Taos Ted before, and so the name produced no impression upon him.

"Well, Taos Ted, as I said before, this is a delicate subject, and I don't feel like giving up this token without a personal interview with the party who gave it to me. I want to know why she wants it back."

"As you say, it is a delicate matter; but I don't see as there will be any harm done if I tell you what I know about it."

"The girl wants her token because she thinks you have gone back on her—she thinks you have got another girl."

The sport gave a start. He had not calculated upon the Indian princess looking upon the matter in this light.

"That is nonsense!" he exclaimed. "And when I see her I will get that idea out of her head."

"Some enemy has doubtless lied to her about me."

And as he spoke, Boston Bob looked sharply at the young plainsman.

Taos Ted was not deficient in shrewdness, and was not the man, either, to allow a remark of this sort to pass unnoticed.

"Now if you mean that for me, you are 'way off your base!" he declared.

"In the first place, I am no enemy of yours, for I never heard of you until last night, and never set eyes on you until this morning."

"The girl, though, is not acting on any second-hand information. She is using the evidence of her own eyes."

"She knows that a certain lady is employed here by you—knows that you escort her home

to her cabin every night, and, in fact, are paying her all kinds of attentions."

"Now she is no fool, although she is an Indian. You have wounded her pride, and she wants her token returned."

"There is the whole thing in a nutshell."

"She is acting hastily; when I see her, I am certain I can explain matters to her satisfaction," Boston Bob remarked, endeavoring to appear unconcerned, although it was evident the matter had greatly disturbed him.

"I reckon that you will not be able to do the trick as easily as you imagine," Taos Ted remarked.

"Well, I can try," Boston Bob rejoined, tartly.

"Oh, yes, there's nothing like trying. Then you object to give me the token?"

"Most decidedly."

"Well, all that is left for me to do is to see the girl and report," the young man remarked, rising.

Boston Bob followed his example.

"Possibly you would like to take my place in the regards of the girl," the sport sneered.

"Maybe I should, but that is nothing to you, unless you want to have two girls on a string at once," Taos Ted retorted.

"You better be careful or you will get into trouble?" Boston Bob warned.

"Oh, I expect to, because if Manuelita tells me that she don't want to see you, and that you must give me the token—"

"What then?"

"As you say, I reckon I will get into trouble, but I will give you fair warning."

"Thank you, and I will do as much for you."

And thus they parted.

CHAPTER X.

THE COLONEL CUTS LOOSE.

TAOS TED returned to the hotel where he found Big Bill Williams.

The old mountaineer was anxious in regard to the interview, and waited for the plainsman's return so he might learn how he had fared.

From Taos Ted's short visit, though, he argued that he had not been able to transact any business, although from the face of the other, which was perfectly placid and unconcerned, he was not able, with all his sharpness, to detect whether his mission had been successful or otherwise.

Of course, Big Bill Williams had not the slightest suspicion that the new-comer had any other motive in visiting the sharp besides inquiring in regard to a mining claim.

"Wa-al, it didn't take you long to fix up the matter," the old mountain-man observed.

"Mebbe I am away out in my reckoning, but I kinder have a suspicion that you didn't do no business with Boston Bob."

"You are quite right," Taos Ted replied.

"We did not succeed in doing any business."

"Wa-al, it happens that way sometimes," the other observed.

"You found him a nice man to talk to, I reckon?"

"Yes, but for all that, I have an idea that if I stay in town he and I will not be apt to get on very well together."

"You don't say so?" Big Bill Williams exclaimed, rather startled by the intelligence.

"Well, it kinder looks that way to me," the young man answered, quietly.

"I see; it is the old story; you are a 'chief' and Boston Bob tumbled to the idea to once that if he tried to crow over you you wouldn't have it."

"Maybe he did," answered Taos Ted, carelessly.

"I have seen the thing act that way a hundred times!" the old mountain-man declared.

"Although Boston Bob is a mighty quiet fellow and minds his own business, yet he knows well enough that he is considered to be about the best man in the town, and I suppose when he came to size you up it kinder occurred to him that you might be inclined to be anxious to run things in this hyer camp."

"As I said before I've seen jist sich a thing a hundred times."

"Two men come together and, from the first, it is war to the knife between them, and without any 'ticular reason either."

Taos Ted nodded.

He thought it was as well to let the old mountain-man take this view of the matter.

"Mebbe he has heard too how you salted Sol Grundy last night," Big Bill Williams continued.

"It is the most 'tonishing thing in the world, you know, how sich a yarn will travel."

"I hav'n't said anything about it," the young man observed.

"No more have I, 'cos I am rather a close-mouthed cuss, anyway."

"But that ar' Gid Bellport has a tongue which is hung both ways and hinged in the middle, and I sw'ar, I do believe he kin git off more chin music than any other five men in the camp!"

"Then he thinks it is the biggest kind of a joke on Sol Grundy too, for Sol is one of the kind of feliers who ar' allers blowing 'round 'bout what hefty fighters they is, and how it takes the toughest kind of a man to git away with them, and the idee that such a rooster should have all the fight taken out of him with one lick is 'bout the biggest joke of the season. And you kin bet your life too, that Gid Bellport will blow it 'round town for all it is worth!"

"Well, I am not anxious to get a reputation as a fighter," Taos Ted remarked, "for I am a peaceable man, and don't want to have any trouble with any one; but, I don't propose to stand any nonsense for all that."

"You are a good man, Taos, I kin see that with half-an-eye," Big Bill Williams remarked, approvingly.

"You are the biggest man for your inches that I ever saw, and you are so mighty well put together that you don't look to be half as big as you ar', and I say, Taos, though we hain't known each other but a leetle while, yet it seems to me jist as if we were old pards, and if you get into any fuss in this hyer camp, you kin bet yer bottom dollar that I am going to see you through, if it takes a leg!"

"Shake!" said the young plainsman, laconically extending his hand.

The two clasped hands.

From that time forth they were pards, bound to serve each other even at the risk of life.

Taos Ted had secured no mean ally when such a man as Big Bill Williams was proud to call himself his friend.

After the compact was concluded, the old mountain-man volunteered to see what he could do in the way of hunting up a mining claim, which should be worth the buying, and he further said: "Mebbe, I will take a hack at mining too, for a while, if we kin scare up a claim which looks as if it had money enough into it fer to pay both of us."

Taos Ted replied that such an arrangement would give him a great deal of pleasure.

Leaving the two to their search for a claim we will return to Boston Bob.

The sport was much more disturbed by the unexpected visit of the young adventurer than he cared to show.

Like many another man in this life, he did not want to be off with the old love before being on with the new.

Besides, he felt perfectly sure in regard to the love of Manuelita, the Apache girl, while he was in the dark as yet as to whether the other cared anything for him or not.

He had done his best to play his cards as well as the wit of man could devise, but whether he had succeeded in making the desired impression upon the beautiful Belle was a question which he was not able to answer.

The colonel's daughter was a cold, apparently passionate creature, but the sharp had a shrewd idea that within the breast of snow there beat a heart of fire, but whether he could ever induce that heart to beat for him was a riddle beyond his comprehension.

He had felt perfectly safe in paying the most devoted attention to the girl, for the idea had never come into his head that the Indian girl would have any knowledge of the matter, and the announcement that she knew all about it was a most disagreeable surprise to him.

True, he knew that since the arrival of the colonel and his daughter in the camp, he had neglected the Apache maid, having only seen her once during that time.

This was imprudent, and now that he reflected upon it, he saw that he had been guilty of a great piece of folly, but the beauty of the other had infatuated him, and for the time he thought of nothing else.

The explosion had come, but, although annoyed, the sport was disposed to make light of it, for he believed the Indian girl was so attached to him that she would be willing to listen to his explanations, and he thought he could persuade her that he had never wavered in his faith.

"As for this fellow who has had the audacity to interfere without reason in the matter let him look out for himself!" he exclaimed aloud in angry tones, at this point in his reflections.

"If he dares to interfere in my affairs, I will make the town so hot for him that he will be

glad to get out, or else I will lay him on the earth so cold that the only service his friends can render will be to plant him as speedily as possible."

And having come to this conclusion, Boston Bob returned to the saloon again to resume the reading of the newspaper.

But he had hardly taken the journal up, when Colonel Chivers made his appearance.

Usually he came to the saloon at ten o'clock with his daughter, for at that hour her duties began.

But now he was fully an hour ahead of time, and the moment he came in, Boston Bob saw that he had been drinking.

For the colonel to be under the influence of liquor was nothing unusual, but as a rule, he did not get "full" until about mid-day, then he would make his uncertain way to his cabin, lie down and sleep off the effects of his potations, only to come down-town again at night, fill up with liquor again, so that when bedtime came, he would be fully as drunk as at noon.

Acting upon the advice of Boston Bob, the girl dealt out money to him with a niggard hand, and all the employees of the All Night Ranch had been instructed to refuse him liquor.

This was a wily device on the part of the sport to curry favor with the peerless girl, and yet the colonel did not find the least difficulty, apparently, in getting liquor, whether he had any money to pay for it or not.

It is an old saying that, though a man may go hungry for the want of bread, he seldom fails to be able to get a drink, if he so far sinks his manhood as to hang around the grog-shops.

That the colonel was rapidly sinking under the influence of this constant debauchery, was quite plain, and the would-be wits of the camp had rather cleverly altered his name from Colonel Chivers into Old Shivers, on account of his shaking condition.

A strange thing about the colonel was that, no matter how much he drank, how unsteady his walk, he could always talk well enough, and always knew what he was about.

In fact, it was the general impression that Old Shivers drunk knew more than Colonel Chivers sober.

As far as a peculiar display of low cunning went, this was certainly the case.

"Hello, Bob, how do you find yourself this morning?" the colonel exclaimed, balancing himself against the table after he had got well into the saloon.

"Pretty well, thank ye."

"Will you have a drink?" the colonel asked, with the air of a millionaire, waving his hand toward the bar.

"No, and you can't have any here; you are too full already. How comes it that you have got your load in so early in the morning?"

"Boston Bob, my dear fellow, I have cut loose to-day," the colonel replied in a grandiloquent way.

"Say! start a game, and I will go in to break the bank."

"Why, have you got any money?" the sport demanded, sharply.

"Oh, no, I mean to play on credit!" then the colonel laughed and retreated to the street again.

CHAPTER XI.

ROPE IN.

"I AM afraid that the old rooster is up to some mischief!" Boston Bob exclaimed.

"I don't like the expression of his eyes."

"I wonder how much longer the old scallywag is going to last? He seems to be getting more and more shaky every day, and yet he holds on to life with a wonderful grip."

"When he is gone, the girl will be here alone and unprotected; not that the old fellow is much protection, still he is a figure-head, and that is better than nothing."

"But when she is alone, then comes my chance, and I reckon there isn't any man in the town who will be able to take her from me."

"And the red-skin!" he exclaimed, abruptly, as thoughts of the dark-eyed Indian princess came into his mind.

"It will require some pretty skillful maneuvering on my part to manage the matter so that the one will not interfere with the other."

"But I can do it if any man can; I have worked some pretty smart tricks in my time, and I don't reckon I am going to be left this heat."

Leaving the sport to his cogitations, we will follow the footsteps of the old gentleman.

Although he had apparently taken in the most perfect good nature the refusal of Boston

Bob to either allow him to drink or play in the All Night Ranch, yet, in reality, he was deeply incensed by the blunt determination of the other.

"You won't have a drink with me, you miserable hound of a gambler, and I can't play at your table, either!" the colonel muttered, in deep disdain as he took his uncertain way down the street.

"The idea of a wretch like that presuming to dictate to a gentleman like I am! The miserable, low-lived gambler—a fellow who thrives by cheating decent men out of their hard-earnings!"

By these expressions it will be seen that the old fellow took the sport's refusal very much to heart.

"But this Boston Bob don't run the only drinking and gambling-saloon that there is in the place, though," he continued.

"I will show him that when a gentleman like myself seeks amusement, he doesn't have to submit to the whims of any such dirty dog as this paltry scoundrel!

"I can't have a drink, and I can't gamble, because I haven't got any money!" he exclaimed, in an extremely sarcastic way, and then he chuckled merrily to himself.

"Ah! well, well; we will see about that."

"Mr. Boston Bob is an extremely smart man, no doubt—one of the ablest citizens of this extremely sweet-scented burg, but the camp of Black Hills City is not the world, and this contemptible gambler is not the greatest man in existence."

"Perhaps before he is many hours older he will make the discovery that Colonel William Chivers is no man's fool—nor his slave, either!" Straight to the lowest part of the town the colonel had proceeded during the delivery of these reflections, and, on the outskirts of the camp halted at one of the lowest dens there was in town.

Chicago Hall it was named, and it was kept by a bullet-headed ruffian, who called himself Choctaw Sam.

How he came by the name no one knew, for he was no more of an Indian than a Chinaman.

One thing, though, was certain. He was as big a scoundrel as could be found in the town and his saloon was notorious for the many disturbances which occurred therein.

It was a "cold night," for Chicago Hall when there wasn't a knock-down and drag-out affair within its precincts.

Like the other saloon, there was very little business done in Chicago Hall during the day, but there were always, both by day and night, a gang of bummers hanging around the place, ready either to drink with or "go through" a customer, as the proprietor thought best.

When the colonel approached he was received with open arms, for the roughs saw that he was pretty well under the influence of liquor, and they had an idea—as Choctaw Sam had suggested when he caught sight of the old man heading toward his place—that Old Shivers would be "good for a stake."

When the colonel got inside the house his first move was to invite all the gang to take a drink with him, an invitation which was accepted with prompt alacrity.

And when the colonel paid for the drinks he displayed a well-filled pocket-book.

The old man had money and the gang were delighted.

Then, in order to lead the victim on, Choctaw Sam insisted on all of them taking a "ball" with him.

After this round was drank, the colonel paid for another, and by this time, he had got into a state when he felt that he ought to let these affable gentlemen know how he had been treated by "that miserable hound of a gambler, Boston Bob!"

And after the gang had listened to the recital the indignation which they expressed was unbounded, and, one and all, emphatically declared that for one gen'leman to treat another gen'leman in any such way was just disgusting!"

Then, Choctaw Sam, quick to take his cue from what the old gentleman had said, remarked that although there wasn't much good of opening a faro game in the daytime, for there wasn't any use of running unless there were four or five players, yet, if any "gen'leman" came into his place, hungry for a "leetle amusement," he always laid himself out to accommodate him by getting up a poker-party, for there was as much fun in poker as could be got out of any game.

The old man bit at the bait immediately.

Poker he declared was his favorite game, and

in the Eastern city from which he had come, he bore the reputation of being about as strong a player as could be found.

So a little game of poker was arranged in a private room back of the saloon, and Choctaw Sam and his gang sat down with the intention of cleaning out Old Shivers in the most complete and scientific manner.

If the old man had been in the full possession of all his senses, and, withal, as good a poker-player as he had boasted, he would not have stood much chance in the midst of such a gang of abandoned scoundrels as Choctaw Sam and his kindred ruffians; but with his senses steeped in liquor, he was as a child in the hands of these accomplished rascals.

As Choctaw Sam would have remarked, if he had put his thoughts into words, the "trick" was worked to the "queen's taste."

Three sat down at the table to "accommodate" the stranger with a little amusement, Choctaw Sam and two of the principal card-sharps who made Chicago Hall their headquarters.

All of them were tolerably expert gamesters, men who could ring in a "cold deal" upon an unsuspecting stranger, or "stock" a hand with adroitness and dispatch.

The colonel's boast was not without foundation in regard to his abilities as a card-player, as the gang soon discovered.

The old man was evidently a veteran player, and thoroughly understood the game in all its variations, but what success could he hope to obtain when all of his antagonists were united against him, and then, too, when it was his deal, so that there wasn't any chance for the confederates to "stock" the cards, by means of one of the outsiders, not concerned in the game, but posted so as to look at the colonel's hands, the exact cards which he held were by means of secret signs revealed to the other players.

The gang did not imagine the colonel possessed any great amount of money—thirty or forty dollars, possibly fifty, at the outside, so they fixed the ante at the beginning of the game at two bits; they were all contemptible "two-bit gamesters" at the best, for men who had any large amount of money to lose seldom patronized so low a den.

So it took about half an hour for the confederate thieves—they were nothing else—to relieve the colonel of the contents of his pocket-book.

"Well, I declare to goodness, gentlemen, I am in for a bad run of luck to-day!" the victim declared as he saw his last stake swept away.

The confederates shook their heads and unanimously declared that they had never seen luck run so contrary.

The thieves were elated at their success for they had won fifty odd dollars from the old gentleman.

And in order to console the loser, Choctaw Sam ordered a bottle of wine, he being the heaviest winner.

After the wine was drank the host remarked that as "gen'lemen" they all felt "obliged" to give the colonel his revenge at any time.

"Oh, I'm game to the backbone, gentlemen!" the old man exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, I am as game as a pebble, and no man ever knew me yet who wasn't willing to acknowledge that fact, either; and I can tell you, boys, I am not at the end of my rope yet, although I reckon you will all admit that not one man of a thousand would be willing to go on playing after such an infernal run of ill luck as I have had."

"You never said a truer word in your life!" Choctaw Sam declared, and the rest of the scamps echoed the saying.

"Oh, I am true blue, all wool and a yard wide!" the colonel exclaimed.

"Luck can't always run against me, and when it turns then I will make you fellows hunt your holes!"

"You bet! I tell you what it is, colonel, you are the boss, and no mistake!" the saloon-keeper cried, and the rest, of course, were quick to chime in.

"I'm not down to the bed-rock but have a heap of wealth!"

And, to prove his words, the colonel fished up from his pockets bills and coins to the amount of a hundred and ten dollars.

Naturally the confederates applauded such pluck and then the sharers "went for" the old man again.

Inside of half an hour, the colonel's "pile" was gone.

"Never say die!" he declared, and produced a diamond ring upon which he asked a loan.

Choctaw Sam gladly advanced a hundred dollars on the trinket, knowing enough about dia-

monds to be sure that the ring was worth double that amount.

And then again the game began.

Under the circumstances there wasn't the least doubt that the confederate rascals wouldn't have any trouble in again breaking the colonel.

CHAPTER XII.

BOSTON BOB ON THE WAR-PATH.

THE more the sport pondered upon his brief interview with the old man, the more suspicious he became that the colonel was up to some mischief.

"There was something about the man entirely different from the way in which he usually carries himself," he muttered.

"He had been drinking, but that wouldn't account for it, for I have seen him under the influence of liquor before.

"There was a deuced sly, artful look in his eyes that I never noticed there before.

"Can it be possible that the old man is going to attempt to try some gum-game upon me? It will not be well for him if he does, notwithstanding the fact that I am mashed upon his daughter."

At this point the cogitations of Boston Bob were interrupted by the entrance of a sporting-looking individual, who bore the name of Barney Macklen—Sly Barney as he was usually termed—one of the prominent "sharps" of the camp, and a particular friend of the keeper of the All Night Ranch.

"Well, Barney, how goes it?" quoth Boston Bob.

"Oh, so, so; by the way, was Old Shivers in this morning?" asked the other.

"Yes."

"Mellow, wasn't he?"

"Yes, pretty full, I should judge; were you with him?"

"I bet you! I met him at the hotel and got four drinks into him in a hurry—got him well-started, you know, and if he isn't sewed up long before noon then I'm no judge!

"But I say, old man, I must make some different arrangement with you, if you want this work performed with neatness and dispatch.

"You allowed two dollars a day for the drinks, and now hyer this morning I have got away with the whole of the money, so when I commence on him to-night I will have to pony up out of my own pocket.

"Now, I am a friend of yours, Bob, and willing to do all I can to help you in this little racket, but this old cuss is such an inveterate soaker that it is too rich for my blood.

"You will have to allow me about four dollars a day, or else I shall have to throw up the sponge and quit the job."

By this time the reader has probably suspected the nature of the compact entered into by these two men.

Boston Bob would not allow the colonel to purchase a glass of liquor in his place, so as to win the girl's favor, yet he secretly employed Sly Barney to induce the old man to drink whenever he met him, and this was the reason that the colonel was usually under the influence of liquor.

"All right, use what is necessary," Boston Bob replied.

"So long as you do the work right up to the handle, we will not quarrel about the expense.

"And, by the way, I wish you would see what the old fellow is up to," the sport continued.

"He acted kinder queer when he was in here a while ago."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, and I got the idea that he was up to some mischief."

"Mebbe so; he is well-heeled with money this morning," the other remarked.

Boston Bob appeared surprised at this intelligence.

"I suppose his daughter gave it to him."

"Possibly, although she told me that she did not dare to trust him with money, for he immediately squandered it away for drink."

"Well, he was flush this morning, for he set up the drinks for a hull crowd, and I noticed that when he paid, he had a good roll—twenty-five or thirty dollars, anyway."

"It is a hundred to one that he has helped himself to the girl's money!" Boston Bob exclaimed.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," observed the other.

"The old cuss is equal to it; but if it is so, I should think it would be a good thing for you, for the less money the gal has, the more chance for you to get her."

"Oh, yes, I sha'n't interfere with him, but I would like to know what he is up to, all the same!"

"Suppose you take a look along the street and see what he is doing?"

"All right!"

"He went down the street, by the way."

"Oh, I will find him, and it is dollars to cents that it will be hanging up by the nose around some rum-shop," and with this remark Sly Barney departed.

He had not been gone over ten minutes when Belle Chivers made her appearance, evidently laboring under considerable agitation.

It was as the sport suspected; the old man had arisen early and searched the cabin before his daughter was out of bed—had succeeded in discovering the secret hiding-place where the girl deposited her treasure and, without the least compunction, had taken the entire store.

"I don't care for the money," the girl said in conclusion, "but my mother's diamond ring which I prize so much, and which is all that I have left to remind me of the parent whom I idolized, has been taken too; and I cannot bear the thoughts of losing that keepsake and I would be willing to give, or to do almost anything to recover it."

Boston Bob jumped eagerly at this opportunity:

"Don't you worry about the ring, Miss Belle!" he exclaimed.

"The money I may not be able to recover, for if your father has spent, or gambled it away, before I can get hold of him, why, of course, I will not be able to do anything about it."

"But the ring is a horse of another color, and if he has parted with it, I will have it back for you if I have to fight the whole town!"

A grateful look appeared on the face of the beautiful girl, but the expressions of gratitude which were on her tongue were checked by the entrance of Sly Barney.

Perceiving that his pard looked at the girl as though doubtful whether to speak in her presence or not, Boston Bob hastened to reassure him.

"It is all right if you were going to say anything about the colonel," he observed.

"Miss Belle knows that he is on a little bit of a racket and, naturally, she is anxious to find out what he is doing."

"He is down in Chicago Hall, Choctaw Sam, and the gang there have fleeced him out every dollar, and now he has just pawned diamond ring to Choctaw for a hundred dollars so as to keep on playing, but it is no use, know, the colonel is no match for any such as that, and if he had a national bank behind him the gang would clean him out, as sure shooting!"

"Oh, my mother's ring then is gone!" girl exclaimed, the hot tears starting in her beautiful eyes.

"Not by a jugful!" cried Boston Bob, springing to his feet.

Reaching down into his pocket he produced a roll of bills, selected a hundred dollars, the rest, and gave them to Sly Barney. He took a rapid look at his revolvers—he was a handsome pair of double-acting seven-shots.

His pard guessed his intentions at once.

"You'll have to keep your eyes open he warned. "There's a half-a-dozen of Choctaw's gang with him!"

"They are a set of curs, and Choctaw's the only man in the party who has an ounce of sand."

"Oh, do not get into any difficulty on our count, I beg!" the girl exclaimed in these hostile preparations.

"Not the least occasion for being frightened I assure you," Boston Bob exclaimed.

"When this thieving gang find the nest business they will crawl soon enough."

"Besides, all I am going to do is to get the ring out of pawn, but in a country man must be always on his guard, and this fellow has his weapons always in order, not half so apt to need them as when otherwise."

And then the two departed, Boston Bob a courtly bow and a smile on his lips first, he was bound on a pleasure excursion, going to beard in his den one of the desperadoes in the town.

"I gave you the money so you could count to Choctaw," the sport remarked to as they headed directly for Chicago and Sol in the event of there being any trouble to have my hands free so as to pull

"Choctaw bears the reputation of world, quick on the 'draw,' and I calculate

with all the advantage on my side that I can possibly get."

"Your head is level, old man!"

"I am not sorry either to get a chance to lock horns with Choctaw," Boston Bob remarked in a reflective sort of way.

"Two of a trade seldom agree, you know."

"Yes, and the scoundrel has been shooting off his mouth around the camp pretty freely about you, I understand," Sly Barney remarked.

"So I have heard. He is reported as having said that I don't run as square a game in my place as he does in his miserable den. Of course, he is only envious, for he knows well enough that nine-tenths of my customers wouldn't be seen in his dive for no end of money."

"The fellow is hardly worth noticing, still, I don't relish any abuse of that kind, and, as a rule, I don't allow any man to throw dirt on me without inviting him to step up to the captain's office and settle for his amusement."

It was only a short distance from Boston Bob's place to Chicago Hall, and by the time that the sport got to the end of this last remark the two were at the door.

They walked in without the least ceremony.

The game had just come to an end as they entered.

The sharpers had fleeced the colonel of his last dollar, and the old man sat looking with wishful eyes at the money which was in little heaps before his adversaries.

And just as the two entered, Choctaw Sam had picked up the diamond ring and was examining it with a grin of satisfaction upon his coarse and brutal features.

It was little wonder that he felt delighted with the morning's work.

Not for many a long day had a "pigeon" been within his net who, in the plucking, had yielded so rich a booty.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ENCOUNTER.

ALL was peaceful within the den, with the exception of the expression upon the face of the haggard old man, who sat staring at the money which the sharpers had so easily wrested from him, as if he was dazed by his unexpected bad fortune.

There were no signs now of the gameness of which he had boasted.

He was utterly depressed by the loss which he sustained, and in order to send the colonel th in somewhat better spirits, Choctaw Sam slered another bottle of wine, thinking the tor would cheer the old man up.

No, no, give me some whisky," the colonel le claimed.

Give me some whisky—something which take hold and bite!

Curse the luck! I must get drunk in order to think of it, or I shall do something despe-!"

It was at this point that Boston Bob and Sly ey made their appearance.

the gang stared with astonishment, not ed with alarm, for the moment the two made their appearance the suspicion at once used in their minds that they came to make le.

the colonel looked abashed when he cau t sight of the cold, stern eyes of the gambler ed upon him.

"I'en having a little game, Bob," he stammered. "Awful bad run of luck for your uncle, though, for I have got completely cleaned

devo There is that diamond ring that you took never our daughter this morning?" Boston Bob would l ed, sternly.

the ann d man glanced around in a helpless sort as if he expected some one of the by- would come to his assistance, but there ie in the room who was willing to vol or a "fuss" with so noted a desperado n Bob.

This vned it with this gentleman for a hun- upon it lars," he ejaculated at last, trembling great p- itement, nodding across the table to had infat- of nothing.

The expl the sport v believed th that she wo ations, and that he had xcitement attending the game I sup- to interfere w ot that little fact."

look out for s, I forgot all about it," the old man angry tones, say, and then he smiled in an idiotic

"If he dare though he thought he had helped to make the tow ters.

"Wa-al, of course I don't know whose ring it is," Choctaw Sam remarked, in a surly sort of way.

"All I know about the matter is that the colonel hyer went broke and asked me to lend him a hundred on the sparkler, and as I allers try to be agreeable to any gen'leman who may happen to strike a bad run of luck in my place, I forked over the sugar."

"All these gen'lemen saw the thing and kin sw'ar that the colonel got a square deal."

"Oh, yes," was the unanimous response of all the "gen'lemen."

"Of course—certainly; no one has said a word in regard to the fairness of the transaction," Boston Bob remarked, in his smoothest way.

"The colonel made a mistake in putting up a ring which didn't belong to him—but every body makes mistakes sometimes."

"Heaps of 'em!" muttered the old man in an undertone, coming to the conclusion that there wasn't going to be "much of a shower" after all.

"But of course you advanced the hundred in good faith."

"The lady has requested me to look after the ring, though, and I am here for that purpose, so, Barney, give Choctaw a hundred ducats and take the ring."

Sly Barney immediately produced the hundred dollars which he held in readiness and shook it toward the keeper of Chicago Hall.

And now in the life of Choctaw Sam came one of those critical moments which make or mar an existence.

The first idea of the chief of the gang was to give up the ring and take the hundred dollars instead.

He could well afford to do it, considering the amount of cash which he had wrested from the old man.

But, just as he was on the point of taking this course, some demon whispered in his ears that the ring was easily worth two hundred dollars, and, under the circumstances, he ought to have some interest for the use of his money.

Then too, the evil genius whispered, if he yielded the ring would not the camp say that he did it because he was afraid of Boston Bob? Afraid to refuse to comply with his demand?

And so yielding to these twin demons, avarice and envy, he changed his reply even on the tip of his tongue.

"Wa-al, look hyer, I don't know 'bout this!" he cried.

"I reckon I ought to have some interest in this ring."

"Then, in a matter of this kind, a loan is just about the same as a sale, and I don't know as I am obligated to return the sparkler if I happen to take the notion into my head to keep it."

"Barney, give Choctaw the hundred dollars and take that ring!" cried Boston Bob in the sharp accents of command.

"Don't you dar'!" yelled Choctaw Sam, reaching for his revolver.

The bystanders ran for their lives with the exception of Sly Barney who stood stanchly by his pard, and Old Shivers, who was so overcome by fright as to be incapable of moving.

Boston Bob was equally as quick to pull his weapon as the host of Chicago Hall, and, being a little more expert at this sort of thing, managed to secure the first shot.

The ball struck Choctaw Sam full in the chest, inflicting a terrible wound, but with bulldog-like resolution he kept his feet until he discharged his pistol. Unnerved however by the fearful injury he had received, the bullet merely grazed the shoulder of Boston Bob instead of striking him full in the throat, and thus inflicting a mortal wound, as the desperado intended.

A second shot from Boston Bob's pistol took Choctaw Sam full in the forehead and the ruffian dropped, dead.

As he fell, Sly Barney sprung forward and wrested the diamond ring from his grasp.

Choctaw Sam had retained the ring in his left hand during the struggle.

"Barney, you had better gather up this wealth and hold on to it until a committee of the citizens decides who is entitled to it," Boston Bob remarked, as cool as a cucumber.

"It won't do to leave it here, you know, for the first one of the gang who comes in will get away with it, as sure as you're born!"

Sly Barney at once proceeded to obey the injunction.

He spread his handkerchief upon the table and put the money into it, and as Old Shivers watched this operation a bright idea came to him.

"Say, Bob, there's about a hundred and sixty

dollars of this money which belongs to me!" he exclaimed.

"I feel sure that dead scoundrel cheated me most outrageously, or else he never would have been able to win my cash so quickly."

"You will have to talk to the citizens about that," the sport replied, shortly.

"If they conclude that you are entitled to the money, well and good, I haven't any objections, but I can't give it to you."

The stern and decisive way in which Boston Bob spoke satisfied the colonel that there wasn't the least use for him to speak further on the subject.

After he collected the money in the handkerchief Sly Barney tied it up, and then the two quitted the saloon, closely followed by the old man.

In the street a crowd had gathered, attracted by the news that the two biggest desperados in the camp, Choctaw Sam and Boston Bob, had pulled weapons on each other.

And when the proprietor of the All Night Ranch stepped through the doorway of Chicago Hall, seemingly unhurt, a hum of amazement rung through the throng.

Although the majority of the crowd, the moment they heard of the fight, had immediately jumped to the conclusion that Boston Bob would get the best of it, yet they did not anticipate he would win an easy victory.

"Fellow-citizens," remarked the sport, in a perfectly cool and collected manner, when he got fairly into the street, "a slight difficulty happened to arise between Choctaw Sam and myself, and, as gentlemen, the only way to settle it was by seeing who was the best man.

"As the thing has turned out I have been elected by a large majority, and Choctaw has gone where 'the whangdoodle mourns her first-born.'

"If there are any of Choctaw Sam's friends, or pards, in this crowd who feel like taking the thing up, why, here I am, ready to command, and there ain't any better time than the present to settle the difficulty."

This was surely a bold and comprehensive challenge enough, and the members of the crowd looked about them, curiously, anxious to see if any of the gang who had followed Choctaw Sam's lead had "sand" enough to answer the defiance.

But, as usually happens in all such cases as this, the members of Choctaw Sam's crowd were exceedingly "backward in coming forward."

Not a soul answered.

To use the vernacular, Boston Bob had "bluffed" the gang.

Then the sport went on to tell how Sly Barney had secured the money which was on the table and was ready to turn it over to a committee whenever the citizens chose to raise one.

The speech finished, the sport took his way to his saloon.

The committee was raised, and when some busybody suggested that it ought to inquire into the circumstances attending the death of Choctaw Sam the idea was scouted at.

The man fell in a fair fight; there wasn't any doubt about that and what more did any one want?

And in regard to the money, the old colonel swore so strongly in one way and all the gang, who were present, in another, each man differing from his neighbor and each and every one claiming that the greater part of the money belonged to him, that the committee, in disgust, decided that it did not belong to any of them, and resolved to devote it to the laying out of a graveyard, "an improvement much needed in the town."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ANSWER.

BOSTON BOB returned the ring to the girl and related how he had not arrived in time to save any of the money.

"Oh, I do not care for that," she replied. "Although my father has taken every penny that we had in the world."

Then in the most generous manner the sharp offered to lend her any amount she liked, five, ten, a hundred, or a thousand, it was all the same to him.

She thanked him for the offer, and said she would be glad if he would advance her half of a week's salary, as that would be all the money she would require.

Customers entering the saloon prevented any further conversation, and so nothing more was said.

The encounter had the result of making business brisk in the saloon, as almost everybody m-

the town dropped in once or twice during the day to get a look at the man who had been fortunate enough to lay out such a desperado as Choctaw Sam in single fight.

Among the other visitors were Big Bill Williams and the plainsman, Taos Ted.

Our hero had not hesitated to confide to the old mountain-man that there was serious danger of a hostile meeting between Boston Bob and himself, and Big Bill Williams had suggested a visit to the saloon in order to have "a good look at the critter," as he said.

At the time that the two entered there were quite a number of customers in the place and, naturally, the death of the desperado was the general subject of conversation.

It was the universal opinion that the camp was the better for the deed.

Choctaw Sam by his insolent and overbearing ways had made a great many enemies, and now that he was gone, there were few in the town who regretted his departure.

The plainsman and the old mountain-man lounged in the saloon for a while and listened to the conversation without taking any particular part in it.

In fact, Taos Ted never said a word, being occupied in inspecting the beautiful girl whom Boston Bob had secured as his cashier.

And she, on her part, soon became conscious of the scrutiny.

Taos Ted thought that in all his experience he had never seen as beautiful a girl, and he did not wonder she had attracted the attention of Boston Bob and caused him to neglect the redman's daughter, Manuela Colorado.

The young girl, conscious that she was the object of the young man's attention, soon found herself casting curious glances in his direction, when she thought she could do so without attracting his observation or that of any one else in the room.

It was the old story—a case of mutual attraction.

The plainsman was dashing and handsome, decidedly superior to any other man in the camp, and it was no wonder that he caught the fancy of the maiden, who, before she looked upon his face, had never seen a man upon whom she cared to bestow a second glance.

Now, our hero was a young man of remarkable acuteness, and it did not take him long to discover that he had engaged the notice of the girl, and that she was looking with a favorable eye upon him.

So, telling Big Bill Williams that he was going to get a cigar, as he felt like taking a smoke, he made his way to the counter behind which Belle sat, attending to her duties as cashier, and at the same time presiding over the cigar-stand.

The selection of half a dozen cigars afforded Taos Ted an opportunity to get into conversation with the girl, and thus he enjoyed the pleasure of a chat with her; and for fully five minutes they exchanged words, discussing not only the merits of the cigars but the peculiarities of the mining-camp.

The young man, taking courage from the girl's manner, improved the chance to tell her that he little expected to encounter such a lady as herself in so wild a region; and she replied, with a half-sigh, that she never expected the chances of fortune would lead her to spend her life in such a place.

As the reader has probably discovered long ere this, the young plainsman was far superior to the average citizen of the border.

He had the advantage of a fine education, came of good stock, and it required no special care on his part to play the gentleman.

Made bold by her friendliness, Taos Ted told her outright that he considered himself extremely fortunate in making her acquaintance, and hoped she would allow him the opportunity to become still better acquainted.

"Faint heart never won fair lady," says the proverb, and it is undoubtedly true that women love a bold and candid suitor.

The beautiful girl was far from being offended with the young man's frankness, and replied, with a slight blush, that although her duties in the All Night Ranch kept her busily engaged from about ten in the morning until midnight, yet the early hours of the morning were her own, and she would be pleased to see him at the cabin occupied by herself and father, any morning prior to the time when she was obliged to come to the saloon.

To the young girl the prospect of the friendship of such a man as this was most delightful.

Compelled by the iron hand of fortune to follow the footsteps of her unfortunate father, such a life as she was now leading was absolutely dis-

gusting to her, and she shrank with loathing from the thought that she would be compelled to live on as she was now living for any length of time.

With mutual regret the couple parted, for both knew that it was not wise to hold a lengthy conversation in so public a place, for such a thing would be sure to excite attention, and cause remark.

As it was, a vigilant pair of eyes had marked the conversation between the two.

Boston Bob had been on the watch and from the beginning had noted the progress of the interview, without, apparently, paying any attention to it.

A thrill of anger shot through his heart as he watched the couple, for it seemed to his jealous imagination that the girl treated the young stranger with far more familiarity than she did him.

And in truth this was so, for there was something about the sport which to the girl seemed to warn her to keep at a distance, despite the fact that he had proved to be so good a friend.

But with the young man she experienced no feeling of this kind.

On the contrary she was attracted to him.

It was one of those strange things, which cannot be explained.

The old colonel, by the way, had become quite an object of interest.

He had been partially sobered by the shock of the tragedy, and the exciting scene which had followed it, when he had endeavored to make the citizen committee give him his share of the money taken from Choctaw Sam's table, and as he was the only eye-witness to the tragedy, besides Sly Barney, he was called upon to relate the particulars of the affray twenty times at least, and as quite a number of the anxious inquirers had thought it was only right and proper that he should be treated after he got through with the yarn, the result was the colonel speedily got "full" again, and was lugged off to his cabin by some sympathizing acquaintances who thought it a shame that the old man—"fatigued by the excitement through which he had passed," as one of the wits of the camp gravely put it—should lie down and go to sleep in the sun, "like a durned yaller dog."

Early upon their arrival upon the scene the two pards had listened to the colonel's story of the fight, and as the old man was scrupulously exact in his recital they got a good idea how the trick had been worked, as Big Bill Williams observed.

The two pards had paid particular attention to the details of the affair, for it afforded them a clew as to the mode of warfare used by Boston Bob.

"He went there all ready for the fight, and, being fully prepared, succeeded in getting the drop on his man," Taos Ted remarked.

"Now, if we come to a fight I don't intend that he shall try that game on me. I want a fair field and a fair show, and you can bet your life I mean to have it."

"That is the talk!" the old mountain-man exclaimed. "Fix the feller so that he can't play no roots on yer, and it is a hoss to a hen that you'll be able to take his scalp!"

Boston Bob brooded over the conversation which he had noticed between Belle and the young plainsman for a couple of days, and then determined to speak plainly to the young girl.

That night, when he accompanied her home, as usual, after he had got the old man into his bunk—the colonel was under the "influence," as usual—he told the girl that he would like to speak a few words with her, and she, with all a woman's instinct, anticipating what was coming, nerved herself to face the ordeal.

Two mornings only had passed since she had first met Taos Ted, but he had contrived to be in the neighborhood of the cabin on each morning when she went out after breakfast to enjoy a stroll in the bracing morning air.

And so the two had met, and enjoyed each other's society without anybody in the town being the wiser for it.

And although there had been no word of love spoken between the two, yet, in some subtle way they understood that they were dear to each other.

It was a hopeless suit then that the sport urged, as he soon discovered.

He sought to dazzle the fancy of the girl by telling her of the life of ease and luxury which he could give her if she would only consent to marry him.

He was rich, he said; he would give up his present mode of life, and they would go to some big city, either east or west, and there he would embark in some regular business, and no one

would know anything of the past life in the mining-camp.

"It is impossible," the girl replied, slowly but firmly. "I do not feel toward you as a girl should feel toward the man she is to marry. You have been very kind to me and I am grateful. I would do anything for you but this."

"You may change your mind. I'm in no hurry and am willing to wait," Boston Bob replied, calmly, as he turned away, but hot anger raged in his breast.

CHAPTER XV.

SCENTING DANGER.

ACCORDING to agreement Taos Ted met the Indian girl in the pine grove.

"Well?" she demanded, eagerly.

"He refuses to give up the token, says he will see you in person and explain matters."

"Explain! false-hearted, white dog, he cannot explain anything to me!" cried the Apache girl in an outburst of rage.

"You must kill this traitor for me!" she continued, fiercely.

"Hold on, hold on!" Taos Ted exclaimed.

"Ain't you going a leetle too fast?"

"And are you lukewarm, too?" the Indian princess cried in contempt.

"Upon my word! it seems as if all you white men are alike—there is not one of you to be trusted!"

"Yes, but you have got this thing wrong end forward. Why on earth should I kill the man for you?"

"Did I not promise to be your slave if you did me this service?"

"Yes, but, my dear girl, I am not in want of any slaves just now," Taos Ted replied, with the utmost good-humor.

"Do you think I do not understand it?" the girl cried, indignantly. "I know the reason for this change. The last time we met you were willing to go to this man and demand the token, although you knew that the demand might bring on a conflict."

"Exactly, there's no mistake about that," Taos Jack replied, calmly.

"I was rash and made a foolish promise, and, like an honest man, I carried it out."

"But now you wish to withdraw!" exclaimed the Indian girl, sneeringly.

"Oh, no, nothing of the kind, although I ought to do so, for I was foolish to allow myself to become embroiled in this quarrel, which does not concern me in the least, but since I have got into it I will see the matter through."

"If you say to me, demand the token again, I most certainly will do so, although it is about as certain as anything can be, that the demand will result in a fight between Boston Bob and myself."

"And do you not think you can conquer him?"

"Well, I don't know," the plainsman replied, slowly.

"That is something which it is not easy to decide in advance.

"Boston Bob is no slouch, and the man who gets the best of him in a fair fight will have to be a good one."

"And you will dare this risk?"

"Yes, for I am a slave to my word!"

"Oh, no, that is not the reason!" exclaimed the Indian princess, scornfully.

"I know better than that!"

"You do?"

"Yes, I have eyes and I can use them. I am not blind."

"You too have been caught by the beauty of this strange white girl. Have you not secretly met and walked with her for two mornings now?"

Taos Ted laughed as though he regarded this as being a joke.

"Oho, you have been playing the spy upon me, then?"

"No, not upon you, but upon her."

"Well, as it happened, in this case it amounts to about the same thing."

"And I understand why you are willing to demand my token—why you are willing to quarrel with this man; it is on account of this white girl with whom you are infatuated."

"Well, now, if she will only contrive to fall in love with me that makes you all solid, for then you can have your lover back again."

"Do you think I would ever forgive the man who once played me false?" the Indian girl demanded, indignantly.

"Well, I don't know; you women are very uncertain creatures," Taos Ted remarked in a reflective sort of way.

"No, no; all is at an end forever between the double-tongued white man and myself," the Apache girl exclaimed, firmly.

"Never again will I trust him. All the love that I once had for him has turned to hate, and I will not rest satisfied until the wrong he has done me has been avenged."

"Well, as far as I am concerned, whether I am in love with the white girl or not, you have no reason to complain that I have deceived you," the young man remarked.

"Very true; you have never professed to be my lover, and I have no right to complain even if you are fascinated by the beauty of this strange white girl," the Indian princess observed thoughtfully.

"Now you are taking a sensible view of the matter," the young adventurer observed.

"My heart is full of bitterness toward this girl, though, and she had best beware how she crosses my path, or it may cost her dearly."

All the savageness of her Indian soul was in the face of the girl as she spoke, and Taos Ted, watching her intently, although taking pains to appear careless and indifferent, came to the conclusion that the words were no idle ones, but that the Indian really meant mischief.

For a moment Taos Ted debated the question in his mind whether it would not be a good idea to warn the girl that if she attempted to molest the colonel's daughter he would be swift to avenge the wrong.

It was only for a moment, though, that he was undecided, for a sober second thought told him the girl would not be apt to pay the least heed to any such warning, and the only result would be to put her on her guard and cause her to be unusually cautious how she attempted any deed of violence.

"Oh, well, you ought not to feel in that way in regard to her; she is innocent of any intent of interfering with you, you know," Taos Ted remarked carelessly, as though he didn't think the thing amounted to anything.

"But do you want me to get the gold bullets for you?"

"Yes, and you can tell this false-tongued white man that I do not wish to see him, and that if he is wise, he will not attempt to come near me, for I will kill him if we ever meet."

And then, with the air of a queen, the Apache girl folded her blanket around her, preparatory to departing.

"I will take an early opportunity to see him. When shall I see you again?"

"Two nights hence, at this spot."

"I will not fail you."

And then the savage princess took the trail leading to the wilderness, while Taos Ted started for the mining-camp.

On his way, he stopped at the cabin where Big Bill Williams had his quarters.

This was in accordance with an arrangement that he had made with the old mountain-man before proceeding to meet the Apache girl.

To Williams the young plainsman related the particulars of the interview.

The old mountain-man shook his head gravely when Taos Ted told of the threatening words used by the Indian princess.

"She is a p'isoned sarpint, now I tell yer!" he declared.

"Folks may talk all they like 'bout the 'Paches being peaceable and satisfied now, and that thar ain't any danger of their going on the war-path, but, I tell you, thar ain't ary bit more trust to be put into one of them than thar is to a pack of hungry wolves on thier track of a wounded buffer."

"Well, I must admit I don't take much stock in the peaceable protestations of these Indians myself."

"They are all good Injuns when they need supplies, and there is a strong military force in the neighborhood, but apt to be durned bad Injuns when they see a good chance to cut loose."

"I have been taking a leetle scout 'round since you've been gone, and I find strong Injnn signs in the neighborhood," Big Bill Williams observed.

"We must be on the watch then. Will you try the rifle with me, Bill?"

"Wa-al, now you kin bet yer bottom dollar I just will!"

"Ain't we pards?—shake onto it!"

And the borderers clasped hands. Two as good men as ever trod Arizonian soil.

CHAPTER XVI. THE APACHES.

THE old mountain-man was right in regard to there being "Indian signs" in the neighborhood for the red-skins were not far off.

After her interview with Taos Ted the

Apache girl made her way by a "blind" trail, as these secret paths, so commonly used by the cunning red-men, are termed, to a secluded glen well up in the mountains, where a small party of Apache warriors were encamped.

There were only four braves in the party and that the chiefs were on the war-path was evident from the manner in which they had adorned themselves.

Four as good warriors were they as the Black Hills Apache tribe could boast.

All young braves—all eager to distinguish themselves upon the war-path, and each and every one of them a suitor for the hand of the Indian princess, but the warriors were such firm friends that this fact did not turn them into enemies as is often the case.

They had agreed among themselves to woo the daughter of Mangus Colorado fairly and squarely, and that no one of them was to attempt any unfair advantage over the other, and all had adhered to the compact to the letter.

And the cause of their assemblage in the secluded glen, in such close proximity to the settlement of the intruding whites, was due to the action of the Apache princess.

Three days before the one on which the warriors assembled in the lonely valley, deep in the heart of the mountains, the Apache girl had summoned the braves to a conference.

She said she had a service to ask at their hands, and requested them to meet her in this valley, which was known to the Indians as the Bears' Glen, from the fact that in bygone days it had been a favorite resort for those animals, and the hunter, in search of such game, was tolerably certain to find one, either in the glen, or somewhere in the neighborhood.

She furthermore requested the braves to come armed with their best weapons, and arrayed in their war-paint, for she intended to show them where they could strike a blow at the hated pale-faces.

And as an extra inducement, she declared that if the braves would comply with her request, she would give them a final answer to the suit which they had been pressing so industriously, and for so long a time.

The warriors gladly agreed to come, and now in obedience to the understanding they were in the glen.

All saluted the Apache princess as she advanced, and she returned the salutation as she took a seat upon a rock which projected from the earth in the center of the glen.

"The daughter of Mangus Colorado is glad to see that the great warriors of the Apache tribe are prompt to fulfill their promises," Manuelita said.

"The Lone Oak always speaks with a straight tongue," replied the tallest and the oldest of the braves.

"Nor is the tongue of the Great Bear man forked," said another warrior.

"Hu-pu-kah is also a chief who never deceives," exclaimed the third.

"And a straighter tongue than the White Elk possesses wags not in the mouth of a human, be his skin red or white!" cried the last of the chiefs.

"It is well, my brothers; I am glad to know that the chiefs of the Apache nation are such slaves to their words."

"The heart of the red maiden warms to her brothers, and she wishes that she could be divided into four parts, each one a living, breathing woman, so that there might be a squaw apiece for my brothers."

The warriors all nodded their heads gravely, in token that this idea met with their approbation.

"But, as there is but one Manuelita Colorado, and she can only be the wife of one chief, then upon me is thrown the burden of the decision.

"My shoulders are bowed with the weight. If I give myself to one, and agree to go and dwell in his wigwam, then I give sorrow to the rest."

Again the chiefs nodded. There was not the least doubt in their minds in regard to this.

"Torn with anxiety, for my brothers, you are all alike so dear to me—no one above the other—that it is impossible for me to make a choice."

"Then the thought came into my head that by the aid of the Mighty Medicine Man of the Apache nation, who dwells in the South, beyond the great prairie, I would ask the Great Spirit to aid me in a choice."

The warriors now gave the most earnest attention, for terribly superstitious is the untaught red-man.

"I sought the Medicine Man, and through him communed with the Great Spirit.

"In answer to my prayer for light, the mes-

sage came that the only daughter of the great chief, Mangus Colorado, must not become the squaw of any warrior, but she must study to become the Great Medicine of her tribe."

The warriors looked at each other in amazement at this announcement, and the disappointment that each man individually felt was plainly apparent.

"It is the will of the Great Spirit that the daughter of Magnus Colorado should not wed with mortal warrior," the girl repeated with expressive earnestness, thus playing in the most skillful manner upon the religious superstitions of the red-men.

But through the old Medicine Man the Great Spirit sent a message telling her the Apache warriors may be consoled.

"In the village of the pale-faces is a white girl, who is as fair a white squaw as the sun ever shone upon!"

The attention of the warriors at this point was intense.

"In a lonely cabin, at the extreme end of the white man's village, dwells this pale-face squaw, no protector but her father, who is an old man, and who drinks deep of the accursed fire-water of his race."

"Never sinks he to rest without his senses being clouded with the drink that makes men mad."

A guttural grunt escaped from the lips of the chiefs at this intelligence, for it revealed that the task before them would undoubtedly be an easy one.

"When the moon begins to droop in the sky what is there to prevent the Apache warriors from seizing the white squaw and bearing her off to their mountain home?"

"The pale-face dogs may howl, but if the red-men are careful to cover their tracks the white-skin will no more be able to follow them than to track a bird through the air."

"It is good!" cried the Lone Oak.

"Very good!" ejaculated the White Elk.

The other two contented themselves with nodding and grunting approval.

"The Great Spirit further said that when the white squaw was safe in the Indian village the chiefs should decide by lot as to which one was to be entitled to her."

The braves all nodded their heads in approval at this idea, for the Indians are, as a rule, inveterate gamblers, and a proposal more suited to their tastes could not be made.

Then the Apache princess explained all the details of the plan to seize the girl which had been most carefully considered, and were arranged with rare cunning.

So eager was the red queen to put into execution her plan of vengeance upon her rival, that it was arranged the attack upon the lonely cabin should be made that very night.

The moon, rising early, began to wane about two o'clock, and at midnight the Indians were in ambush near the cabin.

Five horses had been provided, and they were tethered in a little clump of timber, some distance away.

From their ambush the painted chiefs beheld Boston Bob escort the girl and her father to the cabin.

Old Shivers was more under the influence of liquor than usual, and it was as much as the gambler sport and the girl could do to get him along. After getting within the cabin the old man complained of feeling sick, saying he didn't believe he had more than an hour or two of life left.

But, as far as the sport could see, the colonel appeared to be about the same as ever, and he remarked to the girl:

"The only trouble is he has drank more than usual to-night and the extra dose doesn't agree with him."

This, Belle believed to be the truth, and then Boston Bob took his departure, neither he nor the girl being aware of the fact that the old man was seriously ill, and instead of falling asleep on his bunk, as they imagined, was in a stupor.

The girl, in happy ignorance of this, was about to undress and go to bed when the condition of her father attracted her attention, and she began to be a little alarmed, but as he didn't move and seemed to be sound asleep, she concluded there wasn't any cause for fear. Belle resolved though not to undress, but to lie down with her clothes on, so as to be ready in case her father needed her assistance during the night.

She had determined merely to lie down for a while, so as to rest herself, not to go to sleep; but, in all such cases as this, Dame Nature will have her way, and, as a result, the girl was

sound asleep within five minutes from the time her head touched the pillow.

And she slept as sleep the young and innocent who are free from the touch of cankered care.

No thought had the girl that danger hovered near.

Her father, after a prolonged spree, was in the habit of lying upon his bunk, looking more dead than alive, but when morning came he was always all right again.

And although on this occasion he seemed to be even more stupefied than usual yet the girl, cheered by the assurance of the sport that he was all right, did not dream that her father was hovering on the verge of that dread line which separates a known from an unknown world.

The hand of death was upon the old man even at the time when Boston Bob had declared he was "all right."

His stupor was not caused by the liquor which he had drank, but by the near approach of death.

And from the insensibility which had come upon him, after entering the cab'n, he never arose.

He died—gave up the ghost without even a struggle—glided so peacefully from life to death that no sound awoke the sleeping girl to warn her that the dark angel had come and taken away the wasted life of Colonel Chivers.

Unconscious of the dreadful change which had occurred the girl slept on.

Yet other dangers threatened, for the grim King of Terrors was not the only guest who thought to visit the lowly cabin, unannounced and without warning, on this fatal morning.

At exactly half-past two, just as the moon began to sink in the skies, as though wearied of her vigil, out from a clump of timber, only a short distance from the cabin, crept the Apache princess, Manuela Colorado, and the four Indian warriors, whom she had so cleverly won to do her will.

The braves carried a small tree, some ten or twelve feet long, denuded of its branches and top.

This was to serve as a battering-ram, for the red chiefs were about to adopt one of the devices of the ancient Greeks and Romans and break in the door of the cabin with this massive instrument.

When the red-skins arrived at the cabin, they got in position before the door, prepared themselves for the effort, and then, at the word from the Apache princess, let drive with the tree-trunk at the door.

It was a good, substantial door, and secured by a broad, stout bar.

But so powerful was the shock when the tree-trunk came crashing against the door that the bar was broken in an instant and the door, torn violently from its hinges, was sent flying into the room.

Then, with a cautious shout of exultation, for the red-skins knew how important it was that they should not alarm the sleeping two, the warriors dropped the battering-ram, preparatory to rushing into the house.

But the Apaches were not the only ones who had been on the watch through the dark hours, for no sooner had they thrown down the tree-trunk, than out from the center of a small, but dense clump of pines, not fifty feet away, came the flame and the sharp ringing "bark" of two rifle-shots, fired so closely together that it seemed like the discharge of a single weapon.

And the men who fired the shots were expert marksmen too, for the bullets were sent with so true an aim that the White Elk and the Lone Pine were stricken down upon the instant, and fell, writhing in the agonies of death, dying almost immediately.

The others grasped their weapons and turned to face the unexpected, unknown foes.

And then came two more shots—the attackers were evidently armed with repeating rifles—and down went the Great Bear Man, shot through the center of the brain. The last brave with a bullet in the breast made a desperate effort to give battle, but before he could raise his weapon, the chills of death came upon him, and he too sunk to the ground.

And then the shrill screams of the girl within the cabin, thus rudely awakened, pealed forth on the still air.

The Apache princess had too much of the Indian blood in her to attempt to continue the contest after this terrible disaster and she fled at the top of her speed.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RESCUERS.

THE red men of the plains are as full of courage as any race of people that the world has

ever known, but, according to their rules of warfare, it is the height of folly to begin, or continue an attack unless with a decided advantage, and they do not consider that it is at all cowardly to retreat at the top of their speed when the fortunes of war are against them.

In such a case, according to their ideas, the best runner is the best man.

A single shot only was fired after the girl, and this time the marksman, who had had no trouble whatever in hitting two warriors whom he had singled out, missed the Apache princess, the bullet passing high in the air over her head.

The Indians gained the thicket where the horses were concealed unhurt, threw herself upon the back of one of the ponies, and galloped off at full speed.

With all her courage the red daughter of great Mangus Colorado was panic-stricken by this unexpected defeat.

The shot which had gone so wide of the girl, had been fired by the old mountain-man, Big Bill Williams, and the reason for his bad marksmanship was that just as he fired, Taos Ted, in a fit of generosity, threw up his arm.

"No, Bill, for Heaven's sake, spare the girl! Don't stain your record with the blood of a woman!"

The act saved the life of Manuela Colorado, for the old plainsman had drawn a deadly "bead" on her, and, if his companion had not spoilt the shot, would undoubtedly have driven a ball through her heart.

"She's no woman—she's a p'isoned serpent!" growled Big Bill Williams, annoyed at being cheated of his vengeance.

As the reader doubtless suspected from the first, the ambushed men, who had saved the beautiful girl from so dreadful a fate, were the two pards, Taos Ted and Big Bill Williams.

And now they hastened to the cabin, Taos Ted entering the dwelling, while the old mountain-man, after the fashion of his class, proceeded to possess himself of the arms and valuables of the dead warriors, acting on the motto, "to the victors belong the spoils."

The young man found the girl in a great state of alarm.

The candle which she had left burning upon the table afforded light.

Briefly, Taos Ted explained that the Apaches had made an attack on the cabin, and that he and a friend, happening to be in the neighborhood, were lucky enough to be able to beat off the red-skins.

Then the fact that all the commotion had not disturbed the colonel caused an examination of him to be made, and so led to the discovery of his death.

The grief of the girl was sincere, although not so deep as it would have been, had not the colonel by his actions for a dozen years or so, sapped the love of his child.

"This cabin is no place for you now," Taos Ted remarked, after doing his best to console the girl in her sorrow.

"You must take up your quarters at the hotel, and although this is hardly a time to speak of love and of marriage, yet under the circumstances of the case it must be done.

"Your eyes have told me that I have found favor in your sight; will you not then give me the right to protect you through life? I am tolerably well provided with this world's goods, and can take good care of you, I think, although I know that such an argument will make but little difference to such a girl as you are."

Amid her tears, the girl blushingly admitted that she loved him, and agreed to become his wife, when a sufficient time should have elapsed.

Then, at Taos Ted's suggestion, Belle decided that she would give up her position in the All Night Ranch, and take up her abode in the hotel until the day for the wedding came.

By the time that these arrangements were completed, the citizens of the camp began to arrive on the scene, for the noise of the firearms had aroused the greater part of the town, and although, as a rule, not much attention was paid to this sort of thing, yet the unusual hour and the number of the shots had excited alarm.

Great was the amazement of the camp when they discovered what had occurred, and the two plainsmen became the heroes of the hour.

The fact that the Apaches had dared to attack the cabins did not excite any particular surprise, for the Indian for a long time had manifested an ugly disposition and the miners had expected trouble.

Taos Ted did not think it was necessary for him to explain how it was that he came to a knowledge of the matter, preferring to let the citizens imagine it was by accident alone that

he and Big Bill Williams chanced to be in time to render such good service.

Taos Ted escorted the girl to the hotel, leaving Big Bill Williams to attend to the burial of the dead warriors, who were placed under ground with scant ceremony, for the average miner regards the red-skin as being but little better than a dog.

Plenty of material for talk had the camp when it became fairly awake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DECISIVE MOVE.

ALTHOUGH there had been a great deal of talk in Black Hills City in regard to the prospect of an Indian war, on account of the insolent way in which the red-skins had been conducting themselves lately, still there were not many in the camp who believed the Apaches would really dare to take the war-path against the whites.

The attack on Colonel Chivers's cabin though, opened their eyes to the fact that the red-skins had the inclination to bite as well as bark.

Of course it was impossible for any of the citizens to get at the inside history of the affair, and understand that the attack on the lonely cabin was but a bit of private malice, instead of a blow opening an Indian war.

If Taos Ted and Big Bill Williams had chosen to speak, they could have explained the matter, but, as there was no good to be obtained by so doing, they held their peace, and allowed the townsmen to imagine what they liked.

There was only a single man in the camp, besides the two pards who had any suspicions in regard to the truth, and this was the sport, Boston Bob.

Having been informed by Taos Ted that the Indian girl believed he had deserted her for the beautiful Belle, and knowing her to be both crafty and revengeful by nature, it was but natural that a suspicion should arise in his mind in regard to the Apache princess being concerned in the matter, although, unlike the plainsman, he had not the least proof to go upon.

There was a great amount of discussion among the miners in regard to whether there was any danger of the Indians making another attack, but the camp soon settled to the opinion that, much as the tribe would wish to avenge the death of four of their best warriors, it was not likely any attempt to do so would be made at present, after receiving such a severe check.

Besides, the fact—as the miners assumed—that the savages had made the discovery that two of the best Indian-fighters in the world, as they proudly termed Taos Ted and Big Bill Williams, were residents of the camp, would be apt to make them cautious how they conducted themselves in the neighborhood of Black Hills City in the future.

Boston Bob being a rather heavy sleeper, and located some distance from the scene of the tragedy, did not hear anything about the matter until about seven in the morning, when his particular chum, Sly Barney, took the trouble to come and awaken him to tell the news.

The sport was considerably astonished, for though he expected that Old Shivers would not last much longer, yet he was not prepared for his death in this unexpected way.

Sly Barney also brought the intelligence that the girl had gone to the hotel, escorted there by Taos Ted.

Boston Bob looked grave at this, for, already, he had begun to look upon the young plainsman in the light of a rival, although he had nothing but the barest suspicion to go upon.

"I must wait upon the lady and tender her my assistance and sympathy," the sport remarked.

And after getting his breakfast he did so.

A new surprise awaited him.

The lady received him politely, yet he fancied she seemed ill at ease in his presence.

The sport tendered her his sympathy and, in as delicate a manner as possible, informed her that he would attend to all the details of her father's funeral, and if she needed money he would be glad to have her accept from him all she required.

Belle thanked him in befitting terms and regretted that she would not be able to avail herself of his kind offer, as she had already spoken to the landlord of the hotel, and he had taken upon himself the task of attending to all the funeral arrangements.

And in regard to money she was amply provided with funds.

And then she insisted upon returning the advance money which she had obtained from him

a few days before, saying she was deeply grateful for his kindness, but would not trespass upon his patience longer, as she could get along now, and then she resigned her place as cashier.

Boston Bob was both surprised and disappointed. He was completely checkmated, and he fancied he understood who it was that had so carefully blocked his game at every point.

He took his defeat with perfect coolness though, and was careful not to allow the girl to see how deep was the rage which burned within his heart.

Again repeating his assurance that he would be glad to be able to render her any service, Boston Bob took his departure.

Sly Barney was waiting for him in the bar-room of the hotel, and, being well acquainted with the other, was able to see the moment that Boston Bob made his appearance that all was not well with him.

"Let's have a drink and make some business for the house," the sport observed, in a peculiar, abrupt sort-of-way, altogether different from his usual manner.

The two partook of liquid refreshments at the bar, Boston Bob taking an extremely heavy "dose," something out of the common for him, for he was always a very moderate drinker, and then the pair returned to the All Night Ranch.

Boston Bob led the way to his private room in the rear of the saloon, and the first thing he did after getting fairly within the room—taking care that the door was securely closed—was to bring out a brandy bottle and a couple of glasses and invite Sly Barney to take another drink.

"Hallo! brandy, this time? Why, old man, what has got into you?" observed the other, helping himself to a moderate quantity of the brandy, while the sport filled his glass nearly to the brim and drank it down at a swallow as though it was so much water.

"I'm all on fire!" Boston Bob declared.

"Well, you don't look it! You seem as cool as an iceberg," Sly Barney observed.

"But I say, old pard, what is up?"

Sly Barney, knowing the game which Boston Bob had set out to play, was able to appreciate the situation when the sport finished his explanation.

"And I feel certain that this infernal Taos Ted is at the bottom of the mischief!" Boston Bob exclaimed in conclusion.

"From the looks of things I shouldn't be surprised if you are about right," responded the other.

"I have been getting points about this long-haired cuss, since he has come so prominently before the public," Sly Barney continued.

"Although he is a young man, he has cut quite a dash in this country, and is well-known all along the eastern border as the Arizonian Sport, and in some Injun troubles he won a big name, and that is the reason why he and this old mountain-man, Big Bill Williams, are so thick."

"I don't know what he is, or who he is, and I don't care; but this I do know: this hyer town of Black Hills City isn't big enough to hold both him and me!" Boston Bob exclaimed.

"One of us has got to leave or die!"

"This is bringing matters down to a fine point," Sly Barney observed.

"But I say, Boston, have you calculated all the points of the game?" the sagacious sport continued. "This fellow is no Choctaw Sam that you kin pick a quarrel with, so you kin git the drop on him, and wipe him out without anybody taking the trouble to call you to an account for the matter."

"Thanks to this Injun fuss last night, he is a hero now; and if you should down him in such a way that people could raise the cry that he didn't have a fair show, you would stand a good chance of getting Judge Lynch after you."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that!" Boston Bob cried, impatiently.

"The fellow is at the top of the heap, and if I go for him I have got to give him a fair fight."

"Well, is the thing worth the risk?" the other questioned.

"You must take into consideration the fact that he is a man who has made a regular trade of fighting for some time past, and I have heard great stories of his expertness with all kinds of weapons."

"Oh, yes, of course, he's a hero now, and can whip all creation!" Boston Bob sneered.

"I have met with a heap of these scouts and Indian-fighters in my time, and some of them have been the rankest frauds that ever walked on top of the earth, although if you were to believe the yarns that are spun about them, Samson himself would have to take a back seat."

"I reckon this fellow isn't no fraud though."

"Mebbe not, but I doubt if he is any better man than I am, or as good either!" the sport asserted.

"And when it comes to wiping men out in single fights, I am open to bet the odds that I have downed more men than he has ever laid out!"

"Perhaps so," Sly Barney remarked, but he shook his head as if he wasn't at all satisfied in regard to the matter.

"Of course, as you say, I shall have to give him a fair fight, but I am not afraid of the risk," Boston Bob observed.

"I want you to take him a challenge to meet me with revolvers, on pain of being posted as a coward all over town if he refuses."

"Oh, I reckon he won't refuse!" Sly Barney declared. "Particularly jest now when the camp is making a hero of him."

"Yes, but he may object to fighting with pistols and want to have the affair come off with rifles," the sport explained.

"And though I am not willing to allow that there is any better revolver-shot in the territory than I am, yet, when it comes to a rifle, I am only a fair shot and the odds are big that this scout could afford to give me points and then beat me."

"I reckon thar ain't much doubt 'bout that," Sly Barney observed with the air of a sage.

"He is the man who has spoilt my game—completely checkmated me, and I don't think there is the least doubt about his accepting the challenge fast enough, without taking the trouble to ask the why and wherefore."

"All right, I will go and see him," and Sly Barney rose.

"What's your notion about the time and place?"

"Anywhere and at any hour he pleases!" Boston Bob cried impatiently.

"As far as I am concerned, the sooner the better, and as for the place, out in the street here is as good a place as anywhere, for then everybody can see that the fight is a fair one."

"Kerrect—good-by, I'm off!"

As Boston Bob had anticipated, Taos Ted asked no questions.

"Revolvers will suit me, the street will do, and two o'clock will be a fine time."

And the affair was thus settled.

CHAPTER XIX.

TO THE DEATH.

It was Boston Bob's idea, as he had explained to Sly Barney, to have the fight take place in the presence of plenty of witnesses, so that no one would be able to accuse him of taking any undue advantage of his opponent.

The sport meant to kill Taos Ted if he could possibly accomplish the feat.

Not that he thought he would be able to win the girl by depriving her of her lover, but the mad frenzy for revenge upon the man who had supplanted him, had taken complete possession of the usually cool and deliberate sport.

This it was that had urged him on to the contest; but now that all the preliminaries of the affair were settled, he began to cool down and look ahead.

That Taos Ted had taken upon himself the care of the girl, was evident, for without the assurance of some such support she never would have been able, not only to decline his proffered assistance, but to give up her position in the saloon.

He began to speculate upon the future.

If he could succeed in killing Taos Ted, and the duel so square a one that no one would be able to accuse him of taking any unfair advantage, his reputation as a "chief" would be decidedly enhanced, and, without doubt, he would stand, head and shoulders, above any other man in the town.

The death of the young plainsman would leave the girl alone and unprotected; why then should he not stand a chance to win her?

True, to kill the man she liked was not exactly the way to recommend himself to her consideration, but such a trick had been done before.

A woman is a changeable creature, and if the girl couldn't get the man she liked, she might in time be induced to take another.

Boston Bob had little fear of any other man in the camp stepping forward to rival him in the good graces of the girl.

"If I succeed in taking this fellow's scalp, it will be a warning to any one else that they had best be careful how they intrude upon my hunting-grounds," he remarked, grimly.

Boston Bob's wish that there should be plenty of witnesses to the fight was gratified, for between one and two o'clock, there were ten times

as many people in the main street of the camp, particularly in the neighborhood of the hotel, as were usually there.

The stirring events of the early morning had caused the majority of the miners to knock off work, and flock to the center of the camp, in order to discuss the matter in all its bearings; so the town presented the appearance which it wore on a holiday.

Exactly at five minutes before two Big Bill Williams came out of the hotel, and, at the same moment, Sly Barney made his appearance from the All Night Ranch.

And as the two men marched straight out into the center of the street, there halted and faced each other, they attracted the attention of all eyes.

The citizens immediately surmised that something out of the common was about to occur.

Big Bill Williams waved his hand in the air to attract attention, and Sly Barney did likewise.

All conversation was immediately hushed and every eye was bent on the two.

"Fellow-citizens!" exclaimed the old mountain-man, "thar's a couple of gen'lemen who are going to have a leetle shooting-match in the street hyer, and all you pilgrims who ain't anxious for to stop bullets had better clear out!"

"We want an open space between the hotel and the All Night Ranch!" continued Sly Barney.

This led the bystanders to suppose that Boston Bob was going to be one of the men, and as Big Bill Williams was known to be the particular friend of Taos Ted, the crowd immediately jumped to the conclusion that the young plainsman was the other, though how the pair had chanced to quarrel, or what the quarrel was about, decidedly puzzled them.

The bystanders made haste to get out of the way though, for there was not one of them anxious to "stop a bullet," as Big Bill Williams observed.

Prompt to the minute, just at two, the two men retired, and Taos Ted and Boston Bob advanced into the middle of the street, revolver in hand.

The moment they got into position, Taos Ted advanced rapidly toward the other, coming on in a peculiar zig-zag fashion in order to confuse the aim of his antagonist.

Then, too late, Boston Bob realized that he had had but little practice at so long a range, as almost all his shooting, particularly at a human target, had been done at close quarters.

Taking careful aim, he leveled his revolver and fired.

Taos Ted's zig-zag tactics saved his life, for the bullet came within a foot of him, right on a line with his chest.

Then, quick as a flash, up came the weapon of the young plainsman, and, without dwelling on his aim, he fired!

It was a snap shot, apparently; in reality, the deliberate one of a marksman who owned no superior in all the Arizonian land.

Down went Boston Bob, shot through the center of the forehead, killed upon the instant.

Thus, even in this last move, was Boston Bob checkmated.

Our story is told.

A few more words only.

Taos Ted said the sport had a trinket which he claimed.

Big Bill Williams found the gold bullets, and no one disputed the plainsman's right to them.

There was some mystery about the affair, of course, but what it was no one knew.

Taos Ted had kept his word and redeemed the Apache girl's token, and he contrived to have it sent to her, with a warning that if she ever attempted to molest any of the dwellers of Black Hills City again, he would raise a force and sweep her particular band of Apaches from the earth.

Manuelita returned word that she was satisfied, and that her race would never trouble the camp again.

The Apache princess kept her word, for she believed the plainsman would keep his, and she dreaded his power.

In due time Taos Ted wedded the beautiful Belle.

He and his pard, the old mountaineer, invested in a mine and settled down.

In after years, when the Apache warriors again took the war-path, but in another section, both of the pards took the field, of which bloody series of fights we may write at some future time; and of all the scouts in the campaign, none distinguished themselves more than the bosom pards, Big Bill Williams and Taos Ted, the Arizona Sport.

THE END.

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